THE GLASS

NUMBER 20 SPRING 2008

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

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ISSN 0269-770X

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Editorial

For translation, the *New Shorter Oxford Dictionary* gives interpretation and explanation as one of the meanings from the late 16th century. As well as rendering words into another language there's a basic meaning of transfer, conveying one person, place, time, or condition to another. In Canterbury Cathedral recently, I asked where the famous martyrdom took place. The verger indicated the spot, adding casually that Becket's tomb had been translated to a chapel elsewhere.

George Steiner's attempt in *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975) 'to locate translation at the heart of human communication' allows virtually any text to be viewed as a translation, and his claim that 'repetition is the purest concentrate of translation' invokes a theme of Michael Edwards in *Ombres de lune : réflexions sur la création littéraire*, (2001).

The British Centre for Literary Translation makes a fundamentalist, Steiner-esque, but unexceptionable statement: 'All reading is, in a sense, a kind of translation, a search for meanings in a text written by someone else. We realise the impossibility of ever pinning down "an original meaning" whilst enjoying our own interpretations.

'Literary translation puts the emphasis not so much on linguistic equivalence – as the modern perception would have it – but rather on eclectic affinities between the two writers in dialogue, the translated and the translating; on experimentation with forms, structures and creative devices that the foreign work makes explicit, and which would stretch the target-language usages and conventions once appropriated; finally, on discovering genres, traditions, narrating styles and voices and importing them to their own writing, both translational and non-translational.' (This and more on *www.literarytranslation.com*.)

Marcel Proust contrived a translation of Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens*, a sort of literary guide to the cathedral. In his introduction Proust admits to a translator's effort of explanation: 'Where Ruskin introduces into his writing some reference to the Bible, as the Venetians inserted sacred sculptures and precious stones from the Orient into their monuments, I have always located the exact reference so that the reader, seeing what transformation Ruskin has subjected the verse to before he has assimilated it, may better understand the mysterious yet unchanging chemistry of the original and specific workings of his mind.'

If all reading is translation, so is all writing. In *Time Regained* Proust suggests that a great writer (himself) doesn't really invent anything new, a book 'exists already in each of us' and 'has to be translated.… The function and the task of a writer are those of a translator.'

There is a sense in which the work of translation is never wholly finished. This applies to all great literature and uniquely so to the Bible (so the NIV Preface). In the Bible we read that 'By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away.' And elsewhere it is written that 'a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated Elijah and Elisha, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.'

Both were thus translated, and in the book of Acts something of the sort happened to Philip the Evangelist, moments after he had explained, translated, a passage in Isaiah to the Treasurer of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia. They had been together on the Jerusalem-Gaza road, when Philip was suddenly a few miles away to the north in Azotus.

Names are occasionally translated, albeit elliptically. Simon is Cephas, is Peter, but what does that mean in English? Preachers must expound, and translate again.

There is translation too in the grand narrative. Israel was transferred out of Egyptian servitude back to patriarchal Canaan. Diaspora was reversed more than once. Paul reminds the Colossian Christians that God 'has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son'. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus are a paradigmatic translation that he gifts to many as they believe. It's cosmic, in that the imperfect world will be remade at the end time into a new creation; and personal, as in a sanctified few it is already beginning to be manifest.

Roger Kojecký

Proust Translating / Translating Proust: Reinventions of the Sacred in Text, Image and Film

Margaret Topping

'We possess civilisation because we have learnt to translate out of time.'[1]

Let us imagine that we are standing before the western portal of Amiens Cathedral; its vast sculptural canvas looms above us; our eyes are unsure where to rest, our minds teeming with a rich array of symbols whose meanings – once clear to the thirteenth century sculptor and pilgrim – have become obscured by the shifting semantic and moral terrains of the intervening centuries. On witnessing our perplexity, an altruistic pilgrim and connoisseur of medieval architecture, hands us a well thumbed copy of Ruskin's *Bible of Amiens*. With Ruskin as our guide – or, rather, our translator of this monumental Bible – we begin to see differently. The grand scale complexities of our initial vision begin to resolve into an appreciation of smaller details. Indeed, Ruskin relishes such seemingly minor fragments as the expression on the face of a tiny statue, carefully carved despite the unlikelihood of its ever being noticed, or the angle at which his favoured 'golden Madonna' tilts her head: 'with her head a little aside, and her nimbus switched a little aside too, like a becoming bonnet. A Madonna in decadence she is, though, for all, or rather by reason of all, her prettiness, and her gay soubrette's smile.'[2] Ruskin translates the visual image into text and further nourishes our understanding and imagination by means of a modern, secular image drawn from the world of fashion, an image which transforms this Madonna into a pert 'soubrette'.

A decade and a half after the publication of *The Bible of Amiens* in 1885, Proust begins to translate Ruskin, an eccentric endeavour, some might argue, as Proust spoke little English, and had to rely heavily on his mother and on acquaintances such as Marie Nordlinger for the foundations of his translation.[3] Yet, this was much more than a cross-lingual translation of Ruskin's texts, for Proust's project was to undertake a translation, for readers unfamiliar with the English art critic, of Ruskin's vision. In the copious notes he introduces to complement his literal, cross-lingual translation, Proust provides what he calls an echo chamber that resonates Ruskin's other works by means of extensive quotation and commentary.[4] It is

1 George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford, 1998 [1975]), p. 31.

2 John Ruskin, 'The Bible of Amiens', in E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (eds.), *The Works of John Ruskin*, Library Edition, vol. 33, pp. 5-187 (p. 128).

3 For details of Proust's practice of translation and the publication history of his Ruskin translations, see Richard Macksey's introduction in *On Reading Ruskin: Prefaces to 'La Bible d'Amiens' and 'Sésame et les Lys'*, eds. and trans. J. Autret, W. Burford and P. J. Wolfe (New Haven, 1987), pp. xiii-liii. All quotations from Proust's notes and prefaces are taken from this edition, unless otherwise stated.

4 Proust writes in the preface to *The Bible of Amiens*: 'I have tried to provide the reader with, so to speak, an improvised memory in which I have arranged recollections of other works of Ruskin – a kind of sounding board against which the words of *The Bible of Amiens*

as if Proust understood, before George Steiner couched the idea within his own conception of the world after Babel, that,

> The complete penetrative grasp of a text […] is an act whose realisation can be precisely felt but is nearly impossible to paraphrase or systematise. […] One must master the temporal and local setting of one's text, the moorings which attach even the most idiosyncratic of poetic expressions to the surrounding idiom. Familiarity with an author, the kind of restive intimacy which demands knowledge of all his work, of the best and the botched, of *juvenilia* and *opus posthumum*, will facilitate understanding at any given point. To read Shakespeare and Hölderlin is, literally, to prepare to read them. But neither erudition nor industry makes up the sum of insight, the intuitive thrust to the centre (p. 26).

Yet Proust's 'intuitive thrust to the centre' of Ruskin also marks, I would argue, an 'intuitive thrust to the centre' of Proust. For in its selected accents and emphases, the echo chamber Proust creates for the reader of his Ruskin translation also resonates, for the reader of Proust, the moral and aesthetic vision that will gain materiality in the cathedral/'Bible' Proust's own masterpiece will become. Like Proust's driver shining his car headlights on the darkened façade of Lisieux cathedral, my aim, in this article, is to spotlight features of Ruskin's vision of the Bible of Amiens that have gone unnoticed – or to evoke the frame of reference of the present issue, that have been lost in translation – in Proust's novel. Proust's cathedral, I will propose, is built on the foundations of Ruskin's own.

The little Madonna on the façade of Amiens Cathedral appears to mark, for Proust, just such an 'intuitive thrust to the centre' of Ruskin's vision, for Proust glosses the English art critic's evocation of this figure extensively, notably Ruskin's comparison of her, in *The Two Paths*, to the sculptures of saints on the façade of Chartres Cathedral. It is the seeming vitality of the Amiens Madonna that Ruskin records in *The Two Paths* and that Proust pinpoints and elaborates in his notes to his *Bible of Amiens* translation, indulging in a whimsical fantasy of her face warmed by the sun, to which 'she seemed to direct her centuries-old smile, the smile which Ruskin considers, as you have seen, that of a soubrette to which he prefers the queens of the royal porch of Chartres, [examples] of a more unaffected and more serious art.' (p. 13 [p. 83]). In the French, Proust retains Ruskin's original term 'soubrette', the resonances of performance it has acquired in translation into English usage paradoxically lost in the translation back into the original language context; for while the English 'soubrette' is the coquettish maidservant in an opera or play, the French 'soubrette' has no such theatrical pretensions. She is a maidservant, not an actress. Something of the intensity and the playfulness of Ruskin's consciously posing Madonna is thus stripped away. Yet, while the soubrette maintains her presence in the final version of Proust's paraphrase of Ruskin's description, the manuscript version contains a striking variation. In the draft, the little Madonna's 'centuries-old smile' is one that Ruskin, according to Proust, 'considers almost that of a grisette' (my translation [p. 733]). In Proust's draft 'translation', Ruskin's already secularised 'soubrette' thus becomes a rather more suggestive 'grisette': while the 'soubrette' in French may carry with it connotations of a rather forward

will be able to ring more deeply by awakening fraternal echoes' (ibid., p. 6). The original French text can be found in: Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve, précédé de Pastiches et mélanges, et suivi de Essais et articles*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, 1971). Page references to the French text will be included with the reference to the English translation in square brackets.

maidservant, the 'grisette' is, more unambiguously, 'de moeurs faciles et légères'.[5] It is as if Proust were using his engagement with Ruskin to test the boundaries of 'translation' as a demiurgic, recreative act. Proust's conscious 'mistranslation' of the 'soubrette' as a 'grisette' also signals a ludic intensification of Ruskin's fusion of the secular and sacred which marks a testing of binary constructions of morality. As we shall see, these paradigms are repeated in various permutations throughout Proust's 'translation' of Ruskin's vision into his own novel.

Amiens Cathedral courtesy of Cavorite (Juan Manuel Caicedo) on Flickr.com

Let us jump forward again to 1913 and the publication of the first volume of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (variously translated, in an echo of Ruskin's *Praeterita*, as *In Search of Lost Time* or *In Remembrance of Things Past*).[6] Another saint in her niche (I 56 [I 52]) turns to greet the reader of this first volume, a flesh-and-blood saint who is paradoxically more stony-faced than the granite, yet smiling, Madonna of Amiens Cathedral. A stern Françoise, the possessive servant of the young narrator's great-aunt, whose home he visits on holiday, becomes the silent, foreboding onlooker witnessing the intrusion of the narrator's family into her domain. Where Ruskin drew on the modern, secular world to 'translate' the sacred Amiens Madonna for his contemporary reader, Proust inverts this mode of metaphorical transformation by translating the modern, secular world into a sacred, medieval domain. Ruskin's Madonna becomes a fashionable 'soubrette'; Proust's Françoise a monumental and seemingly unchanging saint. Yet this reversal of time-frame and tone need not imply an opposition of values. There *are* key distinctions to be drawn between Proust and Ruskin; indeed, it is a commonplace of Proustian criticism to cite Proust's early admiration for – even worship of – the English art critic, and to chart the liberation

5 Le Nouveau Petit Robert, ed. J. Rey-Debove and A. Rey (Paris, 1993). The definition implies 'of loose morals'.

6 All quotations from Proust's novel are taken from the following translation: Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, various translators, ed. C. Prendergast (London, 2003). The most comprehensive edition in French is Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, 4 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, 1987-89). Page references to the French text will be included with the reference to the English translation in square brackets.

from this idolatry that had to follow if Proust were to discover his own vocation and identity as a writer. Idolatry is also, of course, a 'failing' retrospectively attributed to Ruskin by Proust.[7] In addition, Ruskin's Christian devotion is commonly contrasted to Proust's agnosticism and to the deviated model of transcendence that Proust's *A la recherche* offers in the form of a salvation through art. These broad brushstrokes that have conventionally defined Proust against Ruskin do not paint an inaccurate picture. However, I would argue that, in terms of the aesthetics of translation and the translation of morality, an at times clear, at times consciously distorted, echo of Ruskin's work (as conceived by Proust) can be heard throughout *A la recherche.* The figure of the Madonna who has stepped from the pages of Ruskin's *Bible of Amiens* into Proust's *A la recherche* will provide a guiding emblem to explore these unacknowledged links between the two writers. In examining Proust's multi-faceted translation of the English art critic, the focus of the present article will be directed less towards his literal cross-lingual translations as towards the interaesthetic, stylistic and 'moral' transpositions of elements of Ruskin's work into *A la recherche*. In examining these areas, our paths will also intersect with that of Proust's own cross-lingual and cross-media interpreters and the difficulties they face when translating Proust's translations. A final section will bring us full circle to contemplate another cathedral, the image of a cathedral which Proust hesitantly attributes to his own novel and which one of Proust's most recent and controversial 'translators', the film director, Raoul Ruiz, has embodied visually in a suggestive fusion of the secular and sacred that recalls Ruskin's living Bible of Amiens.[8]

We thus turn, once again, to the first of our Proustian Madonnas, Françoise. The second is Odette de Crécy who will become Odette Swann and, ultimately, Odette de Forcheville. In a strikingly literal embodiment of the combination of lofty and worldly already witnessed in Ruskin's Madonna, this quintessential 'grisette' will be transformed, in Proust's novelistic universe, into a respectable aristocrat. We shall return to this unlikeliest of Madonnas later.

The sculptural immobility attributed to Françoise in her incarnation as the 'statue of a saint in its niche' (I 56 [I 52]) evokes the permanence of a symbolic status. And, indeed, to the naïve young narrator/protagonist, Françoise seems the saintly incarnation of compassion: 'When we were a little used to this chapel darkness, we could distinguish on her face the disinterested love of humanity' (ibid.). Yet the voice of the mature narrator/writer is already whispering in the background, the tension between these two voices being one of the key sources of humour in the novel. Here, this mature and subtly discerning voice adds an ironic inflection to the initial characterisation of Françoise, an ironic inflection that begins to redefine her as a morally equivocal figure who, like Ruskin's little Madonna, combines both spiritual and worldly attributes. The sentence develops towards a consciously bathetic 'climax': '[the disinterested love of humanity,] the fond respect for the upper classes excited in the best regions of her heart by the hope of a New Year's gift' (ibid.). As if to fulfil Proust's premonition in the preface to the *Bible of Amiens* that unused cathedrals and their emblems will become secularised, this seemingly unchanging symbol quickly loses her sacred lustre.[9] She becomes a figure of

7 This criticism is expressed in Proust's later addition to the introduction to the *Bible of Amiens*. See *On Reading Ruskin*, pp. 49-61 [pp. 129-41].

8 The film *Time Regained*, directed by Raoul Ruiz, has been produced with English subtitles by Artificial Eye (2000).

9 The secularisation of cathedrals is explored in an article by Proust first published in *Le Figaro* in August 2004. See 'Mélanges' in *Contre-Sainte Beuve*, pp. 141-49.

moral ambivalence, as is reinforced stylistically by the sliding scale of tones that is typical of Proust's manipulation of Christian sources. A close consideration of this intersection of moral and aesthetic tensions reveals the presence of Ruskin in the shadows.

Françoise does not hesitate, for instance, to make apocalyptic pronouncements on the fate of Eulalie, a local woman who rivals Françoise for the great-aunt's affections and financial favours:[10]

> It was Françoise's habit, when Eulalie had gone, to make unkind predictions about her. She detested her, but she was also afraid of her and believed that when Eulalie was there she had to present a 'good face'. She made up for it after Eulalie's departure, without ever naming her, in fact, but proffering sibylline oracles, or pronouncements of a general character like those of Ecclesiastes, whose application could not escape my aunt. After watching through the corner of a curtain to see if Eulalie had closed the gate behind her, she would say: 'Flatterers know how to make themselves welcome and collect a little pocket money; but patience, the Good Lord will punish them all one fine day', with the sidelong glance and the insinuation of Joas thinking only of Athalie when he says:
>
> *Le bonheur des méchants comme un torrent s'écoule* (I 109-10 [I 106-7]).[11]

An Old Testament vision of a wrathful God handing down justice defines Françoise's unshakeable faith throughout the novel, its moral certainties generating a comically uneasy tension – of which Françoise herself seems blithely unaware – with her own less than beneficent actions and motivations. The implied attribution of Racine's ill-omened axiom, in the form of *direct quotation*, to this self-satisfied Françoise only serves to emphasise the mechanical nature of her morality. Proust's ironic debunking of her stance of moral superiority is intensified through her interaction with the pregnant kitchen maid. As if assuming for herself the distorted role of righteous God meting out punishment, Françoise tortures this young girl – whom Swann dubs 'Giotto's Charity' (I 83 [I 80]) – by obliging her to prepare the asparagus that Françoise knows will make her violently ill. Yet this deliberate collapsing of Françoise's moral high ground does not transform her into an immoral character, for her sadism combines with an overblown compassion for suffering in the abstract. These two extremes are consciously juxtaposed to comic effect when we read how the narrator's mother sends Françoise to consult a medical book for advice on how to alleviate the kitchen maid's suffering after this latter has given birth, only to find her some time later – the kitchen maid long forgotten – in a state of extreme distress at the suffering of those poor people enduring the medical conditions about which she has been reading (I 123-4 [I 121]). That a meditation on Giotto's *Vices and Virtues* should be woven into this episode provides an immediate link to Ruskin who discusses the Giotto cycle in a number of contexts.[12] As Proust scholars have shown, the Giotto cycle is key to progressing the narrator's understanding of the artist's role. He is, to quote Macksey, initially 'mystified by the chasm between the *name* "Caritas" and the *reality* of the humble,

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[10] Aspects of the characterisation of Françoise, Odette and Charlus in Christian and Biblical terms have been explored in my *Proust's Gods: Christian and Mythological Figures of Speech in the Works of Marcel Proust* (Oxford, 2000).

[11] The quotation, rendered in the notes to the translation as 'The happiness of the wicked rushes down like a mountain stream', is from Racine's *Athalie*.

[12] Ruskin engages with Giotto's work in the second volume of *Modern Painters* (first published in 1846) and, in more sustained form, in *Giotto and his Works in Padua* (1854).

energetic figure with which it is associated – whether in the fresco or in the pregnant servant girl whom Swann had dubbed "la Charité de Giotto"' (p. xxvii). Neither seems to offer an accurate visual translation of the word 'Charity'. But later, the narrator continues, 'I understood that the startling strangeness, the special beauty of these frescos was due to the large place which symbolism occupied in them, and the fact that this was represented, not as a symbol, since the thought symbolized was not expressed, but as real, as actually experienced or physically handled, gave something more literal and more precise to the meaning of the work […]' (I 84 [I 81]). He proceeds to give examples of genuine charity encountered later in life which are embodied in individuals seemingly displaying the 'indifferent and brusque air of a busy surgeon' (ibid.). Echoing Ruskin's emphasis on the 'priority of observed impressions […] over any received "ideas" or "symbols"', the narrator realises that it is the artist who discovers the transcendent truths that emerge through observation of everyday reality.[13] The narrator's resolution of his initial impression of incongruity in Giotto is thus clearly linked, for Proust, to the problematics of translation for the writer communicating reality, and for the reader interpreting the artist's vision.

Virtue and vice

Giotto may be the trigger for an understanding of the role of the artist as translator. However, Proust's moral vision may have been mediated more directly by Ruskin. Where Giotto's cycle of frescos incarnates each vice or virtue in a single allegorical being, Ruskin's meditation on vice and virtue in the *Bible of Amiens* emphasises the coexistence, indeed the inseparability, of the two extremes. He describes the two quatrefoil bas-reliefs that appear one above the other beneath the statues of the apostles on the façade of Amiens Cathedral, 'the upper one under each apostle representing the virtue he taught or manifested in his life, the lower one, the opposite vice' (p. 23 [p. 95]). Thus, 'under St Paul is Faith. Under Faith is Idolatry worshiping [sic] a monster' (p. 24 [p. 97]). This physical juxtapositioning of an elaborate array of virtues and their equal and opposite vices is commented on at length by Proust, later to be re-embodied, I would propose, in an everyday reality in the novel through the figure of Françoise, among others. Here, she acquires her own allegorical significance in the form of a vision of human nature based on moral syncretism or moral mobility, rather than any moral absolutism.[14] Critics such as Roger Shattuck have proposed that Proust unequivocally rejected the 'masked moralism' of Ruskin, and, indeed, that Proust's vision is rarely moralistic.[15] Yet such influential Proustians as Malcolm Bowie have compellingly demonstrated that Proust's vision is certainly not amoral or empty of moral content.[16] Might we

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[13] Macksey, p. xxviii.

[14] The idea of moral 'mobility' has been drawn out in Malcolm Bowie's groundbreaking work. He describes, for example, how 'a throughgoing moral relativism is at work [in Proust's novel]. […] The narrator does veer and vacillate; he does bring together incompatible moral viewpoints. Proust has put him together precisely as a hybrid and an amphibian': *Proust Among the Stars* (London, 1998), p. 188.

[15] Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to 'In Search of Lost Time'* (London, 2000), p. 13.

[16] See Chapter 5 of *Proust Among the Stars*, 'Morality' (pp. 175-208). Here, Bowie argues that, despite the novel's moral mobility, it has 'an overarching moral drama' (p. 188), which is related to, 'but far from co-extensive with, a certain variety of altruism' (p. 199). It is instances of unadulterated altruism – indeed, *caritas* – that provide the clearest examples

not take this a step further and suggest that the moral construction of the novel owes something to Proust's reading of Ruskin's *Bible of Amiens*?

From this translation of morality, we turn, for further synergies between the two writers, to the aesthetics of translation. Proust reveals a preoccupation with the transformative ethic and/or aesthetic that he detects in Ruskin when the latter introduces into his writing extracts from the Bible. Ruskin commonly integrates Biblical quotations into his own text in an unsignalled fashion, for example, a practice flagged up by Proust who, wherever possible, tracks down the original quotation, providing it for the reader in a note. He highlights, moreover, how Ruskin's signalled quotations from the Bible are often embedded in his text in ways that 'restrict a little the meaning and scope' of the original quotation (my translation [p. 94]). As if mirroring the shift from sacred to secular witnessed in Ruskin's presentation of the little Madonna, it is the English critic's mildly transformative practice of Biblical quotation that, I would argue, is magnified, in Proust's hands, into full-blown ludic appropriations of the Bible. Hints of this were already present in the implied quotation from Ecclesiastes attributed to Françoise, but this practice is commonly dramatised in its most vigorous form in such extravagantly carnivalesque characters as Mme Verdurin and, later in the novel, the baron de Charlus. Although more primadonnas than Madonnas, their speech patterns merit a brief digression for the striking examples they offer of a reworking of Biblical sources that may have its more 'reverent' roots in Ruskin. Such appropriations of the Bible may, however, become the victim of what Steiner terms 'lazy translation', for the same barriers operative in cross-lingual translation are, he argues, present within a single language:

> Both the 'external' and 'internal' translator/*interprète* have recourse to lexica, historical grammars, glossaries of particular periods, professions, or social milieux […]. In either case, the means of penetration are a complex aggregate of knowledge, familiarity, and re-creative intuition. In either case also […] there are characteristic penumbras and margins of failure. Certain elements will elude complete comprehension or revival […]. The received message [may be] thinned and distorted' (p. 29).

The complex tensions, the acute moral maze, the archetypally Proustian ironies that are produced when characters (whose self-portrayal may not be disinterested) appropriate the Bible are arguably diluted for readers unfamiliar with this crucial Proustian source text. The quasi-sacrilegious self-aggrandisement enacted by Mme Verdurin in her domination of the faithful who attend the 'church' that is her salon is at least signalled by Proust as echoing a previous text: 'Mme Verdurin would say to them [...] like Christ or the Kaiser, that whoever loved his father and mother as much as her but was not prepared to leave them in order to follow her, was unworthy of her' (IV 276 [III 270]). Mme Verdurin is, of course, drawing on Christ's words to his disciples in Matthew 10.37: 'Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me'.[17] Yet Charlus poses rather more difficulties both for the cross-lingual translator and the reader-as-translator of Proust, in that the presence of the Biblical allusions that constitute one of the richest layers in the

of virtue in the novel. At the novel's moral conclusion, the narrator is able to look 'with a new clarity of vision at the ship of fools whose company he has sought, but to behold their foibles, lies and cruelties with a forgiving rather than an accusing eye […]; he has reached a moment of selflessness and supererogation; his art-project […] is to let others be' (p. 207).

[17] New International Version, 1979.

palimpsest of Charlus's speech is left unspoken by Proust. Living on the glories of his exalted ancestry, the aristocratic baron de Charlus claims the ecclesiastical heritage of three Popes and a cardinal's title. He consequently appropriates both the idiolect and status this confers as an unquestionable prerogative, since moral superiority, to Charlus, is born of social and historical status. For this reason, he can appoint himself as the judge whose role, in a social context, is to 'separate the wheat from the chaff' (III 554 [II 844]) and as the soon-to-be-crucified Christ who accuses another character, saying: 'you, if I can so put it without committing a sacrilege, denied me for a third time' (IV 387 [III 381]). In fact, by himself introducing the concept of sacrilege into the context of his self-professed moral superiority, Charlus might be viewed as flaunting a right to speak in an outrageously self-elevatory manner which, in the mouths of a lesser mortal, would, indeed, amount to sacrilege in his opinion.

The Bible is most frequently imported by Charlus into the aesthetic domain. Yet, to recall Steiner's warning, Charlus's Biblical allusions are, in this context, diluted in their cross-lingual translation. In the quotations that follow, a closer version to the original French (and to the Biblical source) is therefore suggested in square brackets. In reaction to the narrator's lack of appreciation of the symbolic value of the forget-me-not on the cover of the book Charlus had lent him, the latter responds with disdain:

> Young Frenchmen know little of the treasures of our land. What would you have to say about a young Berliner who was ignorant of the *Walküre*? In fact you have eyes that are blind [you have not eyes to see] since you yourself told me that you spent two hours in front of that particular treasure. I can see that you know no more about flowers than you do about styles. Don't start protesting about styles; [...] you don't even know what you're sitting on. You present your backside with a Directory fireside chair and tell it it's sitting on a Louis XIV wing chair. One of these days you'll mistake Mme de Villeparisis's lap for the toilet seat, and one begins to wonder what you'd leave in it' (III 554-5 [II 843]).[18]

Here and elsewhere, Charlus draws on and modifies an exhortation which appears in a number of contexts in the Bible, including Mark 4.9: 'He who has ears to hear let him hear'. He most commonly introduces this verse in the context of the virtuoso violin performances of Morel, another young man who is the object of sexual desire for Charlus. Thus, we find in relation to a particular performance, 'The important thing is to keep out all of those who have ears but hear not [who have not ears to hear]' (V 249 [III 775]). The distinction between Charlus's transferring of religious terms and values onto art and that of the mature narrator/writer is significant: for the former, the ability to distinguish a Louis XIV wing chair from a Directory fireside chair is the pledge of an elevated social position, the indisputable analogue of which is a superior moral character; this is, in other words, an appreciation which reflects, and depends, not on the work of art, but on the social status of its appreciator. For the mature narrator of *Time Regained*, in contrast, the encounter with the work of art is rooted in the unravelling of its essential nature, and ultimately in a quasi-religious salvation dissociated from social symbols or concerns. The immediately penetrable contradictions in Charlus's

[18] The original French reads: Il faut d'ailleurs que vous ayez des yeux pour ne pas voir [...]' (II 843).

position are only compounded by the plunge into a scatological image: the incongruity of such an image being placed immediately after a Biblical reference seems to escape the speaker. That these expressions of aesthetic appreciation are, obscurely but inextricably, tied up with sexual interest in both the violinist and the young narrator further grants the reader an ironic perspicacity when considering Charlus that the character himself does not possess.

In a note to the *Bible of Amiens* translation, Proust explains the various functions of the notes he will include, among which is the following: 'Every time that Ruskin, by way of quotation but more often by way of allusion, incorporates into the structure of his sentences some Biblical recollection, as the Venetians inserted in their monuments the sacred sculptures and precious stones they brought from the Orient, I have always looked up the exact reference so that the reader might see to what changes Ruskin would submit a verse before using it, and thus might better realize the mysterious yet unchanging chemistry of his mind, the originality and precision of his thought.' (p. 7 [p. 729]).[19] Proust does not provide this service for readers of *A la recherche*; the mysterious chemistry – indeed alchemy – at the heart of his own transformation of the Bible is part of the reader's own quest. None the less, the quotation highlights the 'translation chemistry' that links Proust and Ruskin as regards their handling of the Bible, a chemistry that is central to the moral and aesthetic construction of both of their works. Yet, in terms of its destabilising of moral absolutes and its rethinking of conventional values of reverence and irreverence, Proust's chemistry produces rather more explosive effects than that of Ruskin.

Satire with a tincture of the sacred

In interpreting the effects of these reinventions of the Bible, we are obliged, as reader-translators, to determine what Steiner calls 'tone-values', 'the cumulative effect of key words and turns of phrase which may have behind them and, as it were, immediately beneath their own surface, a complex field of semantic and ethical values' (p. 10). The determination of such 'tonalities' 'moves in concentric and ever-widening circles', spreading outwards from the specific moment in the text, to the text as a whole, to 'the context of cultural reference and literature on which it draws' and, indeed, beyond that to the changing 'sphere[s] of sensibility' that define civilisations (Steiner, p. 7). Interpretation of Proust's 'translations' of the Bible into his fictional universe is reliant on the attentive gaze of a reader who has mastered – or is at least familiar with – this source, itself just one in an eclectic range of Proustian intertexts. The reader's interpretation may also be determined by his/her religious and ethical positioning. As the preceding examples demonstrate, Proust manipulates Biblical sources in order to satirise, variously, Françoise's mechanical morality and unconscious hypocrisy, Mme Verdurin's frenzied, social dictatorship, Charlus's extravagant snobbery and quixotic self-deception. Arguably, in appropriating the Bible to these ends, Proust is trivialising the sacred. Yet, in terms of 'tonality', only the finest of lines distinguishes this satirical project from an appropriation of the Bible that lends a genuine dignity to the mundane. The novel offers us an image of Françoise celebrating mass, for instance (III 15 [II 317]). Is this a deliberately irreverent distortion of sacred ritual? Possibly, but such an interpretation denies Proust's metaphorical vision its acute perspicacity, for on

[19] I should like to thank Roger Kojecký for drawing this quotation and the idea of the 'translation chemistry' between Proust and Ruskin to my attention.

realising that it is the sanctity accorded the servants' lunchtime by the presiding Françoise which conjures up the image of a mass, we realise that such an analogy is not only highly innovative, but also, it could be argued, surprisingly apt. Proust's novel betrays a preoccupation with ritual, ritual as it is enacted outside its conventional domains (the metaphorical incarnation of the Verdurin salon as a church with its own faithful, credo and priest is the prime example[20]). Christianity may not come away entirely unscathed from associations such as these, for they certainly deflate the sacrosanct, but Proust is also sanctifying the mundane by redirecting the reverence conventionally accorded Christianity and associated with Christian worship in ways that lend an at times mock, at times genuine, dignity to the unlikeliest of subjects.

Ruskin's 'golden Madonna', who first stepped into the pages of *A la recherche* as a 'statue de sainte dans sa niche' has thus continued to evolve through the ever-shifting characterisation of Françoise. Yet the ambiguities inherent in Françoise are far from the sexualised identity that was tentatively emerging in Proust's experimental translation of Ruskin's Madonna/'soubrette' as a Madonna/'grisette' in the draft note to *The Bible of Amiens*. This sexual ambivalence is granted free rein in Proust's other Madonna, Odette. That Proust's representation of Odette as a Madonna should appear in the context of Swann's artistic idolatry casts a further spotlight on Ruskin's presence in the background. The love affair of Swann and Odette brings together an unlikely couple: Swann, who is working on a critical study of the artist, Vermeer, is the cultured friend of such notables as the Prince of Wales, while Odette, a woman of doubtful aesthetic taste, is described as a 'cocotte', a term which, in contemporary usage, suggests that she is not so very different from a prostitute. She is the quintessential kept woman, and, certainly, there are suggestions in *Swann in Love*, that men have paid to sleep with her. Proust here offers us no conventional love affair. Their relationship is based on Swann's jealous obsession: he agonises over the suspected infidelities of a woman who, in moments of lucidity, he admits is endowed with 'a kind of beauty that left him indifferent, that aroused no desire in him, even caused him a sort of physical repulsion' (I 199 [I 193]). Their relationship has been explored by René Girard in terms of a theory of mediated or triangular desire.[21] For Girard, it is the presence of a mediator that grants the loved one value in the eyes of the lover. This mediator can be a rival for the object of desire, as with Forcheville, Swann's rival for Odette's affection. The uncertainty of possessing Odette that Forcheville's presence creates increases Swann's desire for her, conferring on her an illusory value. The 'little phrase' in the fictional composer Vinteuil's sonata and the paintings of Botticelli also act as mediators of desire: Swann (consciously or otherwise) confuses the pleasure he experiences in appreciating such works of art with pleasure in being with Odette. Odette is thus transfigured by association with these mediators.

Her incarnation as a Botticellian Madonna is prepared by an initial association on Swann's part between his lover and the Zipporah of Botticelli's *The Temptation of Moses*, an association that wilfully bestows upon her a beauty bearing little relation

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[20] This extended metaphor is present from the first page of 'Swann in Love' ['Un Amour de Swann'], the second part of the first volume of the novel, *Swann's Way* [*Du côté de chez Swann*].

[21] See René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris, 1961); translated as *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Y. Freccero (Baltimore, 1966).

to her own appearance:

> Standing there beside him, her loosened hair flowing down her cheeks, bending one knee in a slight balletic pose in order to be able to lean without effort over the picture at which she was gazing, her head on one side, with those great eyes of hers which seemed so tired and sullen when there was nothing to animate her, she struck Swann by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, which is to be found in one of the Sistine frescoes (I 267 [I 219]).

Swann aggressively imposes the essence of the work of art onto external reality. He attempts to 'translate' Odette into a visual image in a bid to possess her and to transform her into an object of desire. The 'nightmare of untranslatability' (p.37) identified by Steiner as inherent in all communication and exacerbated across generations, social groupings, ideological positionings and, indeed, genders is a recurrent theme in Proust in the context of love and desire. Women in Proust's novel represent the 'insaissisable', the 'ungraspable'. Female desire – as embodied by Odette, Albertine, and a host of minor characters – is the epitome of alterity for the men who love them, the epitome of what cannot be represented or even visualised.[22] Swann attempts to counter this epistemological uncertainty by confining Odette within the frame of a painting. Moreover, he transports her into a bucolic idyll in which, invested with the pastoral purity of a barefoot, simply attired shepherdess, she is divested of her worldliness. In so doing, Swann knowingly deludes himself into believing her to be other than the sexually ambiguous seductress he suspects. Indeed, the curiously serpentine curves of Botticelli's necks already suggest hints of deviousness (as does the sinuousness of the Madonna's scarf in the following example).

Swann's attempted wish-fulfilment degenerates, by the time he and Odette are married, into a piteous diversion which convinces Swann no more than it convinces the reader. His illusions have long been destroyed by the time he compares Odette to Botticelli's *Madonna of the Magnificat*:

> Swann owned a wonderful Oriental stole, in blue and pink, which he had bought because it was exactly the one worn by the Virgin in the *Magnificat*. Mme Swann would not wear it […]. Swann would sometimes murmur to me to look at her pensive hands as she gave them unawares the graceful, rather agitated movement of the Virgin dipping her quill in the angel's inkwell, before writing in the holy book where the word *Magnificat* is already inscribed. Then he would add, 'Be sure not to mention it to her! One word – and she'd make sure it wouldn't happen again!' (II 194 [I 607]).

In a curiously and characteristically Proustian blend of the appropriate and the inappropriate, the pastoral ideal of the Zipporah fresco, now unsuited to an older woman, much of whose value is situated in the aesthetic complexity of her apparel, is abandoned in favour of an elaborately and sumptuously attired Madonna. Yet the profusion of gold in 'this costliest of Botticelli's tondos', which bathes Odette in a sacred light, lends an uneasy air to an association which appears grossly exaggerated when applied to this unlikely Madonna, who herself resists the analogy.[23] Swann's self-deception is conveyed through the darkly humorous

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[22] See Elisabeth Ladenson, *Proust's Lesbianism* (Cornell, 1999), p. 53, and Stéphane Chaudier, *Proust et le langage religieux: La Cathédrale profane* (Paris, 2004), p. 388.

[23] R. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work* (London. 1978), p. 54.

incongruity between the visual image of Odette as a Madonna and the textual realities of her characterisation. The possibilities of such 'décalages' (slippages) between image and text may have been suggested to Proust by the playful discordances he notes in Ruskin's own choice of images to illustrate particular passages of text, discordances that Proust attributes to the 'eccentric, one might almost say humorous, disposition of [Ruskin's] mind – which in a sense always led him to avoid what was expected' (p. 8 [pp. 729-30]). Proust cites, by way of example, how Ruskin would 'put opposite a description of the Baptism of Christ by Giotto an engraving representing the Baptism of Christ, not by Giotto but such as one might see in an old psalter' (ibid.). Proust, it seems, pushes the boundaries of these literal image/text slippages, reinventing them as ekphrastic portraits – of which Ruskin was also, of course, a master – that occur throughout the novel to expose such foibles as self-deception, vanity, or pretence. They may also serve, as in the case of Odette, to debunk the improbable moral extremes that have defined traditional constructions of gender.

Marcel Proust, Courtesy of Archive Photos

A filmy undercurrent of paradox and incongruity characterises our two Proustian Madonnas on the moral and aesthetic planes. Their sacred incarnations also disrupt conventional aesthetic hierarchies. As previously suggested, Odette's rich attire is aptly mirrored in that of Botticelli's Madonna; likewise, Françoise's domain, the kitchen, is accorded sacred status – the servants' lunch is a mass that she presides over and that cannot be disturbed; the ingredients for a lavish dinner she prepares for an esteemed guest are as the Carrara marble from which Michelangelo carved the tomb of Pope Julius II (II 19 [I 437]). Beneath our immediate impression of disproportion and incongruity when faced with this Madonna-Odette or Michelangelo-Françoise, we intuit a potent sub-text: that ritual is as much a part of fashion or cooking as of religious ceremony, and that Proust rejects the concept of a rigid aesthetic hierarchy. The cook and the couturier are aesthetic demiurges – indeed, translators of base materials – as much as the poet and the painter. His source? Ruskin writes in *Eagle's Nest*, 'By the wisdom of Nature, it has been appointed that more pleasure may be taken in small things than in great, and more in rude Art than the finest'.

Proust, too, focuses on 'small things' – a gesture, a facial tic, a social ritual, seemingly insignificant fashion items as diverse as a monocle or a pair of red shoes. He focuses, too, on the individuals who embody these gestures, rituals or fashions; and from a consideration of these external features, moral and psychological portraits emerge. Mme Verdurin's 'pantomime' of laughter reveals the hollowness of social rituals (I 208-9 [I 202]); Legrandin's extravagant bow before a local doyenne, a bow that, in a virtuoso piece of comic writing, sets his fleshy behind rippling like a storm-tossed sea, reveals that beneath his impassioned pronouncements of indifference to the social world, he is a painfully socially-aware snob (I 126 [I 123]); M. de Guermantes' façade of concern about arriving late at a party and genuine horror on realising that Mme de Guermantes is wearing black, not red, shoes with her luxurious scarlet gown, prompts one of the acutest moral portraits (of vice) in the novel: his agitated distraction at these social and fashion catastrophes enables the Guermantes to be distracted also from their supposedly dear friend Swann's revelation that he will soon be dead from a terminal illness (III 595-6 [II 882-3]). Out of these moral and psychological vignettes, that themselves emerge from observation of small, materials things, are born 'truths' that will be universalised in the work of art.

At the end of *A la recherche*, Proust searches for a metaphor to express the novel the narrator/protagonist is to write, the novel we have just read. Combining both small and great things, lofty and trivial, sacred and secular, he toys with a range of images: a church, a druidic monument, a cathedral, but ultimately, he settles on a simple dress:

> Think how many great cathedrals have been left unfinished! One feeds a book like that, one strengthens its weak parts, one looks after it, but eventually it grows up, it marks our tomb, and protects it from rumours and, for a time, from oblivion. But to return to myself, I was thinking about my book in more modest terms, and it would even be a mistake to say that I was thinking of those who would read it as my readers. For they were not, as I saw it, my readers, so much as readers of their own selves, my book being merely one of those magnifying glasses of the sort the optician at Combray used to offer his customers; my book, but a book thanks to which I would be providing them with the means of reading within themselves. […] And as every few moments I changed the comparison by which I could best […] represent the task on which I was embarking, I thought that at my big deal table […] I should construct my book, I don't dare say, ambitiously, as if it were a cathedral, but simply as if it were a dress I was making (VI 342-3 [IV 610]).

Proust had originally planned to structure his novel in relation to the physical construction of a cathedral. Individual sections were to be entitled nave, transept, apse, and so on:[24] a seemingly fitting metaphor, one might argue, for this singularly monumental and illuminating text. Yet, the metaphor is rejected by Proust. For him, the reader's engagement with a novel cannot be a passive one. His or her role, as the quotation above suggests, does not end at the final pages of the novel. To cast his novel as a cathedral may thus have been too suggestive of monolithic conclusions, of wisdom, an authoritative vision. In many respects, Proust's novel comes full circle with cycles of apprenticeship completed, but *A la recherche* is also grounded in a calculated refusal of closure, an openness, a space for self-discovery. For Proust, reading is a spur to undertake one's own search, an idea already germinating many years earlier in his meditation on reading ('Sur la lecture') in the preface to his translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*.

In the final volume of the novel, *Time Regained*, set in wartime Paris, the narrator and Charlus lament the threat to churches and cathedrals by aerial bombers. Charlus wonders about the fate of Amiens Cathedral, saying:

> 'I don't know whether the uplifted arm of St Firmin is now broken. But if it is, the highest affirmation of faith and energy has vanished from this world. – The symbol of it, Monsieur, I responded. I adore certain symbols as much as you do. But it would be absurd to sacrifice to the symbol [the truths which it teaches]' (VI 104 [IV 374]).

Despite the centrality of metaphor to Proust's vision, the symbol, for him, is not an object of veneration, an 'error' of vision that he retrospectively attributes to Ruskin (and, of course, also to Charlus whose sense of self, as previously discussed, relied on social symbols). It is the truths that these symbols convey, truths that we may intuit but only fully appreciate with the artist's mediation, truths that are not fixed in stone, but that evolve through the reader's engagement with the work

[24] For a full analysis of the image of the novel as cathedral, see Luc Fraisse, *L'Oeuvre cathédrale: Proust et l'architecture mediévale* (Paris, 1990).

of art, truths that emerge out of fixed moments in time, but which endure in a transcendent space outside time.

One of the most recent 'translations' of Proust dramatises his understanding of the novel in potent visual terms. The director, Raoul Ruiz, in his 1999 film adaptation of *Time Regained*, returns to the image of a cathedral, in itself, one might argue, a distortion of Proust's vision. The 'translation' from text to film is doubtless a challenging one in the case of a novel commonly described as 'unadaptable'.[25] Earlier adaptations such as the 1983 film of *Swann in Love* offer, it is true, little more than a flat and one-dimensional exercise in story-telling that conveys little of the stylistic tones and textures that are among the principal pleasures of Proust's novel. Ruiz opts for a more creative approach that has received a mixed critical response. For Roger Shattuck, the film is 'impossible to follow':

> The viewer unfamiliar with the *Search* is simply lost. […] Someone who knows Proust's novel comes to feel [he/she] is taking an examination with endless identification items and subtly garbled questions. Chronology becomes very confused, as do the places where the scenes take place. […] Ruiz offers us a generous handful of Proust materials. But [he] has also splintered the storyline and scattered the major motifs. Without them, the movie *Time Regained* remains an opulent sampler (p. 206).

The fine line between translation and creation is, indeed, highly imaginatively drawn by Ruiz, and deserving of study within the context of theories of translation. How does one evaluate a 'translation' that makes little sense without intimate knowledge of the original source and remains tantalisingly puzzling even to a viewer equipped with such knowledge? There are nonetheless moments in this film, moments of supreme fantasy – even surreality – that are alien to Proust's novel, but which paradoxically, succeed in creating an echo chamber in which the source text resonates in allusive and elusive ways. Ruiz's cathedral, which appears in the last minutes of the film, just as Proust's hesitant evocation of the novel as cathedral comes in the last pages of *A la recherche*, offers a poignant example.[26] In an embodiment of temporal transcendence that is key to such central Proustian concepts as involuntary memory and metaphor, both the young narrator/protagonist and the mature narrator/writer appear together. They walk through a building suggestive of an abandoned – and, initially, it seems, desolate – cathedral. As the camera follows this dual narrator, so we as viewers (and symbolically as readers) make our way through this cathedral. It is a cathedral physically constructed of individuals (reminiscent of the figures on the façade of Amiens Cathedral that Ruskin describes and brings to life by evoking the stonemasons who took pride in sculpting them). Yet, these are strikingly modern figures, the figures embodied in Proust's novel; they press out from the walls of the cathedral, engaging the reader/viewer who will grant them universality through the sense of empathy and recognition they produce. This is, moreover, a secular cathedral in which fragments of different places and times – Venice, Combray, Balbec – are layered and meld together. Ruiz constructs the novel as a cathedral, not a dress, but he does so in a way that, true to Proust's hesitation over the image, makes it a living, changing monument, its very textures infused with the outside world.

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[25] See, for example, Robert Castle, 'Proust Regained: On Raoul Ruiz's *Time Regained* and Filming the Unfilmable', *Bright Lights Film Journal*, 51 *http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/51/proust.htm*, accessed 18 January 2008.

[26] The scene comes from chapter 25 of the Artificial Eye DVD.

To conclude, then, our path has taken us full circle from Ruskin's Amiens Cathedral to Proust's novelistic cathedral. The figure of the Madonna first spotlighted by Ruskin (and by Proust in his notes to the Ruskin translation) has been our guide, the various incarnations she assumes in Proust's creation offering a means to illustrate the multifaceted problematics of translation by which the novel continues to 'live' and flourish. Obstacles to translation are both intradiegetic and extradiegetic. Within the diegesis of the text, characters are confronted with barriers of communication created by jealousy, obsession, the desire for control of the loved one, the loved one's resistance to possession. As Steiner observes, 'we speak to communicate. But also to conceal, to leave unspoken' (p.47). For the writer outside the action who is building his cathedral, textual and visual sources are subjected to acts of interpretation that are also new acts of creation. In this, we have detected the presence of Ruskin as an influence whose moral and aesthetic vision is, at times, reflected, at times, consciously 'mistranslated' by Proust. Ruskin's handling of Biblical quotation, his fusion of the sacred and secular, his interpretation and introduction of visual sources into his texts, all find their way, in playfully reworked form, into Proust's text, there to provide moments of revelation that spring from observation of individual characters or situations, moments of epiphany that reveal his role as artist. The voice of the 'moral theorist' that has often been unheard in Proust may also owe something to a secularised echo of Ruskin, in translating whose words Proust arguably found both a locus of influence and a rehearsal ground for his handling of Christian sources.[27] Proust's reader, too, must of necessity become a translator, an identity that aptly reflects the active role Proust ascribes to his readers. This reader-as-translator is obliged to decipher a complex web of intertextual reference whose presence may have been lost in translation as fields of knowledge shift and change. Likewise, Proust's cross-media translators respond to an unenviable dilemma: the literal fidelity of a simple dramatisation of plot or a new *poesis* that, to use Steiner's terms, touches the original source in 'momentary ricochets' (p.14), but is essentially a new creation barely recognisable as translation in the conventional sense. That translators continue to rise to this challenge, most recently in such varied forms as a new English version produced by seven different translators, a serialised radio adaptation, a comic book and, most innovatively perhaps, a ballet, suggests that Proust still has much to say to us.[28] The last word should thus be his. Like Ruskin, he sees the artist as a translator who interprets the world in ways that resist convention and prompt a freshness of vision: 'I became aware that […] the only true book was not something the writer needs to invent, in the usual sense of the word, so much as to translate, because it already exists within each of us. The writer's task and duty are those of a translator' (VI 199 [IV 469]).

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[27] The term is used by Malcolm Bowie in *Proust Among the Stars* (p. 176) to encompass the fluctuating moral 'voices' of the narrator: that of the moral philosopher, the *moraliste* and, occasionally, the *moralisateur*.

[28] In 2005, the novel was dramatized into 6 hour-long slots by Michael Butt for the Radio 4 classic serial; between 1998 and 2006, Stéphane Heuet has published comic-book versions of most of the first two volumes of the novel; and the choreographer Roland Petit's 1974 ballet version of Proust's novel, entitled *Les Intermittences du coeur*, entered the repertory of the Paris Opéra Ballet for the first time in March 2007.

Beowulf, the monsters and the poet

Paul Cavill

This paper focuses on Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*[1] and what is lost or found in this literary translation of the medieval poem. But first I make some remarks about translations of medieval literature in general to give some context to Heaney's approach and achievement.

Medieval English and related literature has attracted some gifted and interesting translators. In order to express some sense of how good Heaney's *Beowulf* is, we might compare it with the work of translators who lack Heaney's clarity and ear for language, or perhaps have other preoccupations in translating.

My first quote is from Evelyn Underhill's 1912 translation of the fourteenth century anonymous work, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Chapter 17:

> That a very contemplative list not to meddle him with active life, nor of anything that is done or spoken about him, nor yet to answer to his blamers in excusing of himself.
>
> In the gospel of Saint Luke it is written, that when our Lord was in the house of Martha her sister, all the time that Martha made her busy about the dighting of His meat, Mary her sister sat at His feet. And in hearing of His word she beheld not to the business of her sister, although her business was full good and full holy, for truly it is the first part of active life; nor yet to the preciousness of His blessed body, nor to the sweet voice and the words of His manhood, although it is better and holier, for it is the second part of active life and the first of contemplative life.
>
> But to the sovereignest wisdom of His Godhead lapped in the dark words of His manhood, thither beheld she with all the love of her heart. For from thence she would not remove, for nothing that she saw nor heard spoken nor done about her; but sat full still in her body, with many a sweet privy and a listy love pressed upon that high cloud of unknowing betwixt her and her God...[2]

It is possible to work out what the passage is saying, but it needs perseverance. We notice the otiose prepositions (*to* his blamers, in excusing *of* himself), strange syntax (reflexive *meddle him*, repetition of *her sister*, inversion *beheld she*); and use of archaic vocabulary: *very*, *list*, *dighting*, *beheld*, *full* as an intensifier, *listy*, *betwixt* and so on. Underhill is simply giving a modern equivalent for the Middle English of her source, and one might ask what she intends to gain by it.

If we were to translate the first sentence of the last-quoted paragraph as 'She attended with all the love of her heart to the highest wisdom of his deity wrapped around in the mysterious words of his humanity', we would have replaced the earthy and rather sensual vocabulary of the original (which continues throughout) with modern theological vocabulary; and moreover we would have reversed the order of sense, which in Middle English allows the fronting of the object for emphasis. Medievals were less shy about sensuousness in religion than we tend

1 Seamus Heaney, trans., *Beowulf* (Faber, 1999). The translation has appeared in various editions of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* since 1999. For comparison with the Old English poem I have used Fr. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edn. (Boston, D. C. Heath and Co., 1950).

2 Quoted here from the 2nd edn. 1922, in Alister E. McGrath, ed., *Christian Literature: an anthology* (Blackwell, 2001), p. 222.

to be; but in Underhill's translation perhaps the archaism makes it less immediate and therefore possibly more acceptable.

This is barely a translation at all. What we find in it is perhaps an authentic late medieval voice; but the immediacy which that voice would have had for its fourteenth century audience is lost because the oddity of the language to a modern reader interposes itself. *The Cloud of Unknowing* (a forbidding title in itself) becomes a 'classic of spirituality' in the process, with all that that implies for its readability and practical usefulness.

My second extract is from a very different kind of work, William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon's 1892 translation of Eyrbyggja saga, *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers*, Chapter 1:

> Ketil Flatneb was hight a famous hersir in Norway; he was the son of Biorn Rough-foot, the son of Grim, a hersir of Sogn. Ketil Flatneb was a wedded man; he had to wife Yngvild, daughter of Ketil Wether, a hersir of Raumarik; Biorn and Helgi were hight their sons, but their daughters were these, Auth the Deep-minded, Thorun the Horned, and Jorun Manwitbrent. Biorn, the son of Ketil, was fostered east in Iamtaland with that earl who was called Kiallak, a wise man, and most renowned; he had a son whose name was Biorn, and a daughter hight Giaflaug. That was in the days when King Harald Hairfair came to the rule of Norway. Because of that unpeace many noble men fled from their lands out of Norway; some east over the Keel, some West-over-the-sea. Some there were withal who in winter kept themselves in the South-isles, or the Orkneys, but in summer harried in Norway and wrought much scathe in the kingdom of Harald the king.
>
> Now the bonders bemoaned them of that to the king, and prayed him deliver them from that unpeace. Then Harald the king took such rede that he caused dight an army for West-over-the-sea, and said that Ketil Flatneb should be captain of that host. Ketil begged off therefrom, but the king said he must needs go; and when Ketil saw that the king would have his will, he betook himself to the faring, and had with him his wife and those of his children who were at home. But when Ketil came West-over-the-sea, some deal of fighting had he and his, and ever got the victory...[3]

We notice similar things about this extract, particularly strange syntax and odd or archaic vocabulary. One can actually work out what it all means with a bit of ingenuity: *hersir* is obviously a high rank, *West-over-the-sea* is Iceland and so on. Once again it is designed to (and does) replicate as far as possible a different language, close to, but not entirely like modern English: the saga starts, 'Ketil flatnefr hét einn ágætr hersir í Nóregi',[4] for example, and it is evident that the translation is hardly striving for dynamic equivalence.

There was a huge vogue for romances of yesteryear and Viking days in the Victorian period, and Morris's translations fed an appetite that clearly enjoyed the piquant sauce of Viking archaism.[5] In this translation, and the many like it, what is found, or effectively created by the language, is a previously unknown or unexploited identity between Victorian readers and the Viking heroes of the past. The literalness disguises the art of the translators in producing readable, indeed addictive, transformations of sagas into Victorian novels. The loss in these

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3 William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon, trans., *The Story of the Ere-dwellers; with the story of the heath-slayings as appendix* (Bernard Quaritch, 1892), p. 1.

4 Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, ed., *Eyrbyggja saga*, Íslenzt Fornrit IV (Reykjavík, 1935), p. 3.

5 For a thorough treatment, see Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: inventing the old north in nineteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2000).

translations is only discerned over long acquaintance with the sagas, and it is perhaps stylistic levelling: the style of *Eyrbyggja saga* and that of any other saga or *Heimskringla* is much the same in the translation, whereas in the originals there are quite stark differences.

Morris's *Beowulf* translation adopts the same kind of techniques with the poem:

> What! we of the Spear-Danes of yore days, so was it
> That we learn'd of the fair fame of kings of the folks
> And the athelings a-faring in framing of valour.[6]

To my mind, the archaisms (*yore days*, *fair fame*, *Athelings*, *a-faring*) and the extraneous and repeated prepositions (*of*), the inversion (*so was it*) and ellipsis (*learn'd*) and syntactic distortion generally, get the story off to a bad start. When we turn to Heaney's translation of these lines:

> So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by
> and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.
> We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns –

immediately we have a sense of the past from the poem, and not from the lexical choices or syntax. We recognise the language, and we sense rather than analyse the delicate alliteration. We are introduced to a place of far away and long ago without the adventitious aid of archaism. 'So' has been criticised as a Northern Irishism as well as an archaism, but is much to be preferred to 'What!', or 'Lo!'[7] or 'What ho!'[8] or 'Hear!'[9] or 'Once upon a time', or any other gambit that I have come across, or Heaney himself has (p. xxvii). It attracts the attentiveness that the Old English 'Hwæt' was designed to, and suggests the unfolding of a tale to come; and it does so effortlessly.

That is not to say that Heaney does not use archaism at all: he does, and not always for good reason. His justification for 'His'''tholed' in line 14 of the translation, as a word used by his aunt and John Crowe Ransom, and a 'loophole' for him into *Beowulf* itself (p. xxv–xxvi) does not really work, though it is honest. The word is, for the casual reader without the benefit of Northern Irish dialect or historical linguistic knowledge, no better or worse than Morris's *hersir*. But generally Heaney's English is contemporary, crisp, musical and precise: it is poetry, but not laboured or difficult. So it seems to me that Heaney's work fulfils a fairly obvious requirement of translation: to give the original chance to speak in a new language; and it does it well, indeed uniquely well.

Nevertheless, I think Heaney's translation loses something theologically. Heaney knows the tradition of the poem – others of his works such as *Bone Dreams* treat Anglo-Saxon themes and images – but also the scholarly tradition underlying the reception of the poem. It is universally accepted that the characters of the poem were heathen and known to be such, but that the poem was actually

6 William Morris and A. J. Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf Sometime King of the Folk of the Weder Geats* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), p.1.

7 Chauncey Brewster Tinker, trans., *Beowulf Translated out of the Old English*, rev. edn (New York, Newson & Co., 1912), p. 9.

8 John Earle, trans., *The Deeds of Beowulf* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 1.

9 David Wright, trans., *Beowulf* (St Albans, Panther Books, 1970), p. 27.

composed or compiled by a Christian. Heaney repeats the scholarly commonplaces about the Christianity of the poem, noting that:

> It has often been observed that all the scripture references in *Beowulf* are to the Old Testament. The poet is more in sympathy with the tragic, waiting, unredeemed phase of things than with any transcendental promise. (p. xix)

It rather depends on what passes for a 'scripture reference', of course, but heaven and hell and devils are not Old Testament ideas.[10] Despite coming to the poem with a 'prejudice in favour of forthright delivery' (p. xxvii), Heaney mutes the poet's own forthrightness when it runs counter to the established theological assumptions he records. The New Testament heaven and hell appear clearly in the poet's forthright condemnation of the Danes' idolatry early in the poem:

> Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed
> offerings to idols, swore oaths
> that the killer of souls might come to their aid
> and save the people. That was their way,
> their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts
> they remembered hell. The Almighty Judge
> of good deeds and bad, the Lord God,
> Head of the Heavens and High King of the World,
> was unknown to them. Oh, cursed is he
> who in time of trouble has to thrust his soul
> in the fire's embrace, forfeiting help;
> he has nowhere to turn. But blessed is he
> who after death can approach the Lord
> and find friendship in the Father's embrace.

The central contrast between heaven and hell is well rendered by 'cursed' and 'blessed', and Heaney has retained the Old English repetition of 'embrace' to reinforce it. That sense the Danes are to be pitied is at least partly conveyed by the exclamatory addition 'Oh' and the adversative 'But', not in the original. However, Heaney has fought shy of what the Old English says about those who thrust their soul into the fire's embrace, namely that they can 'expect no relief, nor anything to change at all': having 'nowhere to turn' in Heaney's translation suggests a kind of puzzlement, quite a different prospect from the hell of the poem. He achieves this by a kind of half-translation: Old English *gewendan*, transitive, has the principal sense 'change' as in this line in *Beowulf*; but *wendan*, intransitive, has the principal sense 'turn', and this is the sense to which Heaney himself turns to avoid an uncomfortable piece of what he elsewhere calls the poet's 'doctrinal certitude' (p. xvi).

In recent criticism, the poet's Christianity has been widely questioned. Heaney does not agree, but in the case of Beowulf's death, Heaney does not allow the poet's 'doctrinal certitude' full expression. The poem, Heaney thinks, is 'imagined within a consciousness that has learned to expect that the soul will find an ultimate home among the steadfast ones' (p. xvii). But of course the poet does not in any

[10] This issue, and that relating to the translation of *soðfæstra dom* later in the article, are treated in some detail in Paul Cavill, 'Christianity and Theology in *Beowulf*' in idem (ed.), *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: approaches to current scholarship and teaching* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 15–39.

sense embrace the kind of universalism implied by that statement about 'the soul' in general. And once again Heaney does not quite say what the poet says:

> His soul fled from his breast
> to its destined place among the steadfast ones.

The phrase here is in Old English *secan soðfæstra dom* (line 2820), 'to seek the judgement of the righteous'. Heaney has been swayed by the doctrinal incertitude of scholars to miss out both judgement (though *dom* can also mean 'praise' in Old English, it amounts to much the same thing) and the righteous. Once again, he does it by half-translating: *soðfæst* 'just, righteous' is deprived of its defining element *soð* '(Christian) truth', and is given as the much less doctrinal and more heroic 'steadfast'. The point here is that the poet is not asserting that the hero was 'saved' or that his soul had any 'destined place', but that he would experience judgement (or praise) either by those who are righteous, or as one who was himself righteous – the latter in my view being the more likely, since it recalls the recurrent medieval debates about the fate of the 'righteous heathen' as well as Paul's theorising in Romans 1–3.

There are, then, particular theological aspects of the poem that Heaney's translation obscures – with the help of scholarly consensus, to be sure. And this is in interesting contrast to his treatment of the monsters in the poem. Tolkien's great article, '*Beowulf*: the monsters and the critics' mentioned by Heaney in his introduction, took the monster-fights as central to the artistic purpose of the poem. For Tolkien, the monsters symbolised the destructive forces in the world, always to be resisted, but never entirely to be overcome.[11] Heaney has fully internalised this, as he notes:

> What happens ... is what W.B. Yeats would have called a phantasmagoria. Three agons – three struggles in which the preternatural force-for-evil of the hero's enemies comes springing at him in demonic shapes; three encounters with what the critical literature and the textbook glossaries call 'the monsters' – in three archetypal sites of fear: the barricaded night-house, the infested underwater current and the reptile-haunted rocks of a wilderness. (p. xii)

Now, never at any point does the poet suggest the Grendels are people you would wish to have as next-door neighbours. But his vocabulary is rather more ambiguous about them than Heaney's is; and he certainly never suggests that the dragon is 'demonic' in shape (interestingly so, in view of the Biblical tradition which equates the serpent or dragon with Satan and the devil).

Both Grendel and Grendel's Mother, as well as the dragon, are referred to by the term *aglæca*: Heaney translates 'monster', 'monstrous' four times (in the OE, lines 433, 816, 1259, 2557), and 'fiend' another time (line 1000). This would be fine, and it follows Klaeber's glossary admirably, but the fact that the term also applies to Beowulf several times in the Old English, where it is not translated 'monster' or 'fiend', must give us pause. Fred Robinson has suggested that a translation like 'assailant' or 'fierce combatant' might be more appropriate.[12] Likewise the term

[11] J. R. R. Tolkien, '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936), 245–95.

[12] Fred C. Robinson, '*Beowulf* in the Twentieth Century', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 94 (1997), 45–62, at p. 51.

feond is the normal word for 'enemy', but is sometimes translated 'fiend' (line 439) or 'monster' (line 962); the latter translation is also given for *lað* 'hated one, enemy' (line 841). Twice the name Grendel is transmuted into 'monster' (lines 1586, 2353).

Perhaps because of this semantic transference and expansion of monstrosity and the resulting dilution of the term 'monster', Heaney appears to feel a need to make aggression and real monstrosity worse, and more than once uses religious or theological terms for this. *synscaða* 'evil-harmer' (line 801) is translated 'demon'; *nicera mere* 'pool of water-monsters' (line 845) becomes 'demons' mere'; *sinnigne secg* 'evil warrior' (actually used of Grendel's Mother, line 1379) becomes 'demon'; and *dior dædfruma* 'bold initiator of aggression' (line 2090) becomes 'raging demon'. The significance of this kind of translation is not perhaps immediately apparent, and it is that Beowulf talks of the Grendels far more respectfully than the poet: he reports his fight with Grendel to Hygelac, and his fight with Grendel's Mother three times and does not use the religious vocabulary of exclusion for them, and little enough of the monstrous vocabulary. They were dangerous opponents to him, and he treats them with respect. Beowulf, of course, was not a Christian, and Heaney is blurring some of the distinctions that the poet makes, and probably took trouble to make.

Helen Philips has commented on how Heaney deals with Grendel's Mother:

> Heaney cannot resist the temptations (and they must have been strong) to turn this murderous feminine monster who rises from the mere into one of his own 'bog-queens', or destructive mother-goddesses. She becomes a bestial but frightening manifestation of disgust and sexualised frenzy. The appellations foreground her femaleness and denigrate her: dam, hag. For the Anglo-Saxon poet her gender seems of only incidental interest: appellations stress either her fierceness or her role, a dignified and quasi-legal one in this society, as avenger of murdered kin.[13]

Philips goes on to comment on the phrases *ides aglæcwif* 'a lady, a warrior-woman' (line 1295) translated as 'monstrous hell-bride', *heo* 'she' (line 1292) translated as 'hell-dam', *grundwyrgenne* 'cursed female of the deep' (line 1578) translated as 'swamp-thing from hell'. Philips argues that the feminist issue here is real, but also that this kind of translation disrupts the delicate patterns created by the poet in relation to the way the female characters clustering around this episode mirror each other in their attempts to protect their children.

But what strikes me about these phrases, and others, is that Heaney has a tendency to characterise opponents as monsters, and then to characterise monsters as hellish. He does not sense the sneaking sympathy, understated but surely present, that the poet generates for this woman in a man's world, frightened but fiercely and in some ways justly revengeful for her son. He does not quite sense the outrage of Grendel's Mother at the invasion of her home (an underground cave, but again there is a sense that Grendel's Mother might be feeling 'it's not much, but it's home'), called by the poet *ælwihta eard* 'home of monsters' (line 1500), and *niðsele* 'hostile hall' (line 1512), but by Heaney 'outlandish lair' and 'hellish turn-hole'. It was Heaney's expressed wish to avoid 'the slightly cardboard effect that the word "monster" tends to introduce' (p. xiii), but he has substituted a slightly Hallowe'en effect for the cardboard 'monster'.

A close reading of Heaney's translation shows that in at least two cases

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13 Helen Philips, 'Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*', in Tony Curtis (ed.), *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, 4th edn. (Seren, Bridgend, 2001), 263–85, at p. 275.

Heaney dislikes 'doctrinal certitude', and prefers a non-judgemental stance at variance with that of the original poet. In other cases, where it is clear that he is on safe ground in condemning the adversaries, his translation overemphasises their monstrosity or devilishness, giving the poet 'doctrinal certitude' where he did not have it. I think this tells us something about Heaney's cast of mind, something that he does not readily admit to, at least in his writing about the translation of *Beowulf*.

Heaney wears his Irish heart on his sleeve: 'Sprung from an Irish nationalist background and educated at a Northern Irish Catholic school, I had learned the Irish language', he writes, and goes on to muse about 'the relationship between nationality, language, history and literary tradition in Ireland' (p. xxiv). He talks about himself as a product of 'the political and cultural conditions of Lord Brookeborough's Northern Ireland'. He does not mention here what everyone else in the English-speaking world associates with that Northern Ireland, namely the profound and all-embracing influence of Protestant-Catholic religious tension.

A religious gloss was habitually put on the deep divisions within the culture from which Heaney sprang, both by the protagonists in the conflicts and by commentators on it. Heaney reacts to that by ignoring its influence in his autobiographical comments, and perhaps by fudging the poet's 'doctrinal certitude' in his translation: religion of this definite kind is divisive and dangerous. He excludes religion from the formative conditions of his own thought and poetry, but he also religiously excludes those literary opponents of the poem: they are hellish, God-cursed and demonic, even when they were not obviously so in the original poet's mind. He puts a religious gloss on divisions that are clearly acknowledged. Thus it seems to me that some of the Irishness that shaped Heaney's mind finds expression in the way he responds to the poem. Something of the original poet's art is lost; but a readable poem, which tells the attentive reader a lot about the original poem, and something more about the translator, is found.

Grendel's mother, transformed out of all recognition, was played by Angelina Jolie in the 2007 Paramount Pictures film 'Beowulf'. Ray Winstone played Beowulf, and Anthony Hopkins Hrothgar.

The Word of Maldon

(Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lytlað)

Sun struck the water as the flood
unfolded, and the waiting men,
the warbright ranks, made ready then;
knew they were doomed to die; yet stood.

The foe found footing on their land;
sword broke shield and splintered shaft;
leaderless then, and hope-bereft,
each thane emboldened each to stand.

'We took our master's gift,' they said.
'It is not fitting we should live
except in him; we have no leave
to save our lives now he is dead.'

Reading the tale, I covet words
such as a Christian might employ:
stricken in years, soon shall I lay
my life by my beloved Lord's.

Remembering his goodness all
my world-time, with my best of breath
I will make boast to keep the faith,
the font-faith holding till I fall,

and take the word of steadfastness
from one who played a soldier's part:
'firmer the thought, keener the heart,
courage the more, as strength grows less.'

Note: In the year 991, Viking raiders in considerable force put into the River Blackwater, near the town of Maldon, demanding that the men of Essex should buy peace with a payment of tribute. The demand being vigorously rejected, an onslaught followed, in which the ealdormann ('earl') commanding the Saxon defence was killed; his *heorþwerod*, his 'companion guard', true to the soldierly code of Germanic tradition, stood firm and fought on to the death. The poem called *The Battle of Maldon*, written at the time or very shortly afterwards, records their names, their deeds, and their words, among the latter, most memorably, the speech of one Byrhtwold, 'an old companion', quoted here.

Walter Nash

Separating Speech in Saussure and Sibbes: the Differentiating Function of Language

David Parry

Roy Harris begins the introduction to his translation of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* as follows:

> Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* occupies a place of unique importance in the history of Western thinking about man in society. It is a key text not only within the development of linguistics but also in the formation of that broader intellectual movement of the twentieth century known as 'structuralism'. With the sole exception of Wittgenstein, no thinker has had as profound an influence on the modern view of *homo loquens* as Saussure.[1]

It is a startling claim, perhaps rather grandiose-sounding. Jonathan Culler is just slightly more modest in his claims for Saussure, saying, 'together with his two great contemporaries, Emile Durkheim in sociology and Sigmund Freud in psychology, he helped to set the study of human behaviour on a new footing'.[2]

Harris helpfully highlights two aspects of Saussure's legacy – one is the scientific field of structural linguistics, in which many of Saussure's specific proposals have been superseded. The other, which more nearly concerns those of us engaged in literary or cultural studies, is the broader field of semiotics, the study of sign systems, in which Saussure's ideas provide a potent vision of reality, which, if contested, must still be engaged.[3] Semiotics quickly gave birth to structuralism, which has spawned innumerable competing critical perspectives. The Swiss patriarch has fathered warring tribes.

While it would be foolish to deny or begrudge Saussure his immense influence, it needs to be recognised that his concepts were not necessarily as new as sometimes assumed. For instance, Saussure proposes a new discipline of thinking about signs:

> It is therefore possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. It would form part of social psychology, and hence of general psychology. We shall call it semiology (from the Greek sēmeîon, 'sign'). It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them. Since it does not yet exist, one cannot say for certain that it will exist. But it has a right to exist, a place ready for it in advance.[4]

Saussure is perhaps mistaken to assert that the science of signs he proposes 'does

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[1] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye with Albert Riedlinger, trans. Roy Harris (London, Duckworth, 1983), p. ix.

[2] Jonathan Culler, *Saussure* (Fontana Modern Masters) (London, Fontana, 1976), p. 7.

[3] Saussure's lectures were posthumously published by his students, but I will attribute the contents of the *Cours de linguistique générale* to 'Saussure'.

[4] Saussure, pp. 15-16 [p. 33]. Page references in square brackets refer to the original French edition.

not yet exist'. The Middle Ages, for instance, has a rich semiotic tradition. Robert Kilwardby, the thirteenth century Dominican philosopher and Archbishop of Canterbury, tells us that '*Sermo totaliter signum est'*; 'Speech is nothing but a sign'.[5] Though there is discussion in classical philosophy of the nature of signification, notably in Plato's *Cratylus*, much semiotic reflection takes place within the framework of Christian thought. The concept of the sign, the *sēmeîon*, is a pregnant one for theological discourse, as shown, for example, by the Gospel of John.

Read in conjunction with Saussure, Augustine of Hippo's *De Doctrina Christiana* (On Christian Teaching) is particularly striking.[6] This primer on Biblical interpretation anticipates by 1500 years many of the ideas thought distinctive to Saussure. For example, Augustine, like Saussure, considers language as one sign system among many, though the most important.[7] Both Augustine and Saussure consider linguistic signs, spoken and written, to be human social institutions, and, as with other socially instituted sign systems, to derive their meaning 'not by nature but by agreement and convention'[8] Both writers see monetary currencies and languages as analogous localised systems of value, involving a set of arbitrary units given significance by the agreement of a specific geographically bounded community.[9]

Here I would like to turn to a perhaps less obvious figure, the seventeenth century preacher Richard Sibbes.[10] Sibbes was born in or around 1577 and died in 1635. He is generally considered a Puritan, though, as usual, this depends on one's definition of Puritan. Sibbes's career follows a fairly typical Puritan profile. He had a provincial upbringing in Suffolk, followed by study in Cambridge with the encouragement and support of 'the godly', leading to a college fellowship. He was a 'town lecturer' (or preacher) at Holy Trinity Church in the centre of Cambridge and later was appointed to a preaching position at Gray's Inn, in London. He

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5 Robert Kilwardby, *De ortu scientiarum*, ed. A. G. Judy (Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi, 4) (London, Oxford University Press, 1976), cited in Stephan Meier-Oeser, 'Medieval Semiotics', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2003 Edition)*. Online at *http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2003/entries/semiotics-medieval/* (accessed 15/1/2008).

6 As David Jasper notes, 'Though a standard study by Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (1977), focuses almost exclusively on the twentieth century, in fact students of St Augustine of Hippo's work *On Christian Doctrine*, dating from the fourth century CE, will quickly become aware of his very sophisticated theory of semiotics in his reading of Scripture.' ('The Study of Literature and Theology', in Andrew Hass, David Jasper and Elisabeth Jay, *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology* (Oxford, OUP, 2007), p.27.)

7 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H Green (Oxford, OUP, 1997), II.1-7 (pp. 30-31). The same English translation is found in the Latin/English edition of the *De Doctrina Christiana* in the Oxford Christian Texts series (Oxford, Clarendon, 1995); Saussure, *Course*, p. 15 [p. 33].

8 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.93 (p. 52). See Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.89-103 (pp. 51-54); Saussure, *Course*, pp. 67-68 [100-101], 111-112 [157].

9 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.100 (p. 54); Saussure, *Course*, pp. 79-81 [114-116], 113-114 [159-160].

10 See Mark E. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, GA, Mercer UP, 2000); Mark E. Dever, 'Sibbes, Richard (1577?–1635)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, OUP, 2004) (available online to subscribers).

also served as Master of St Catherine's College, Cambridge. Sibbes is one of a loose association of Cambridge Reformed divines dubbed by William Haller 'the spiritual brotherhood'.[11]

Sibbes is worth getting to know for his acute and warm pastoral insight, which gave him the epithet of the 'comfortable Doctor'[12] *but he may* seem an odd choice to compare with Saussure. Sibbes wrote no treatises on hermeneutic method, as did some of his Puritan colleagues. However, in Sibbes's work *A Description of Christ*, we can find some intriguing parallels with Saussure's central insight that language is characterised by differentiating one thing from another.[13] *A Description of Christ* is a posthumous compilation of three sermons which were preached as an introduction to the sermons constituting Sibbes's best known work, *The Bruised Reed and the Smoking Flax*.[14]

A Description of Christ takes as its text Matthew 12:18:

> Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets (I:3)

The work explores the calling, the mission and the character of Christ. The 'high commission' of Christ is found by Sibbes in the words 'He shall shew judgment to the Gentiles'(I:26). This is followed, naturally enough, by the question 'What is meant by judgment here?' (I:26)

This seems to be a preacherly leading question intended to introduce a digestible definition of what 'judgment' means in this verse. Yet Sibbes gives, not a single, but a manifold definition, which spreads over three densely argued pages of the standard edition: 'By judgment is meant laws', we are told, and 'Now, in the Hebrew language, ordinarily, wise government is called judgment'(I:26) So far, so good, but then we read 'And, indeed, grace is called judgment'(I:26), and Sibbes asks 'But why is the word of God called judgment?' (I:27) He continues, 'Again, not only the word of God, the gospel, which is out of us in the book of God, is called judgment, but the work of God in the soul, sanctification, is called judgment'(I:27).

Though these different definitions, or different strands of a definition, are woven together by Sibbes's argument, there may not seem to be a readily apparent connection between them. I would suggest that the key is to be found in a paragraph in which Sibbes parallels Saussure's understanding of language as differentiation:

> But why is the word of God called judgment?

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11 William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 49-82.

12 E.g. by Richard Baxter, in *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (cited in U. Milo Kaufmann, The Pilgrim's Progress *and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven/London, Yale UP, 1966), p. 142). Witness also Isaak Walton's tribute: 'Of this blest man, let this just praise be given: heaven was in him, before he was in heaven.'

13 Richard Sibbes, *A Description of Christ* in *Works of Richard Sibbes* (7 vols), ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862-4) (rept. Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1973-83), I:1-31.

14 As with Saussure's lectures, *A Description of Christ* was published after Sibbes's death and may not reflect completely accurately what he said.

> It is called so frequently in the Psalms, and in other places of Scripture, because the truth of God shews what God doth judge. Judgment is originally in God, who is the first truth and the first good. The first truth judgeth best of truths; what is light and what is darkness, what is truth and what is error, what is good and what is ill, what is safe and what is dangerous. All will grant that God is the first light and the first truth; therefore, he doth originally judge of the difference of things; for even as in the creation he put an eternal difference between light and darkness, and severed things that were in the confused chaos, and established an orderly world, that heaven should be above, and earth below, that one thing should be above another, and all in judgment; so in the governing of mankind, he shews his judgment by his word, and that word shews how God judgeth of things (I:27).

God judges, that is, he distinguishes one thing from another. He differentiates. Sibbes draws on a key Biblical example of this in the Genesis creation narrative, where God, having spoken the world into being, proceeds to separate out 'the confused chaos' into 'an orderly world' by his speech.

It is to God's judgement in creation, to his differentiating speech, that Sibbes appeals to show that God has the authority to judge our lives by his word. God's differentiation and ordering of things in creation shows that he has the authority to differentiate in ethical matters, to judge 'what is good and what is ill', to order our lives by his law. Our redemption, likewise, is God's reordering of our fallen wills to conform us once again to God's right order given in creation, accomplished by 'the truth of God and the Spirit in us, framing our souls answerable to the truth'(I:28). It is the unifying thread of God's differentiating authority which enables Sibbes to call all these things 'judgment'. Judgment is discernment or differentiation, and right judgment is a right differentiation, a right ordering of things.

The Genesis creation narrative on which Sibbes draws finds echoes, whether or not intended, in Saussure's account of the origins of linguistic meaning. Saussure too sees speech as involving an ordering of things and a shaping of a prior chaos, saying that

> Psychologically, setting aside its expression in words, our thought, is simply a vague, shapeless mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed that were it not for signs, we should be incapable of differentiating any two ideas in a clear and consistent way. In itself, thought is like a swirling cloud, where no shape is intrinsically determinate. No ideas are established in advance, and nothing is distinct, before the introduction of linguistic structure.[15]

Our mental cosmos prior to the emergence of language, as described by Saussure, resembles the 'confused chaos' prior to God's speech described by Sibbes. Not only thought, but also sound, the raw material one's vocal apparatus produces, has no distinct boundaries and forms an amorphous continuum:

> The substance of sound is no more fixed or rigid than that of thought. It does not offer a ready-made mould, with shapes that thought must inevitably conform to. It is a malleable material which can be fashioned into separate parts in order to supply the signals which thought has need of.[16]

So what shapes this swirling chaos of thought and sound into an ordered

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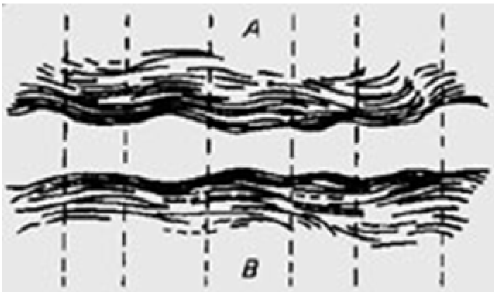
[15] Saussure, p. 110 [p. 155].

[16] Saussure, p. 110 [p. 155].

representation of reality? It is the act of speech. Saussure taught that our mental concepts do not correspond to prior objectively real entities in the world. Rather the distinctions between one thing and another which form our mental categories are created by linguistic signs, which cut the continua of thought and sound up into manageable segments which acquire a given meaning by joining thoughts and sounds to each other:

> Thought, chaotic by nature, is made precise by this process of segmentation. But what happens is neither a transformation of thought into matter, nor a transformation of sounds into ideas. What takes place, is a somewhat mysterious process by which 'thought-sound' evolves divisions, and a language takes shape with its linguistic units in between those two amorphous masses.[17]



The diagram inserted in Saussure's text at this point consists of two horizontal blocks of wavy lines representing the indeterminacy of both material sound and mental activity. There is a space in between them which is bridged by dotted lines representing the delimiting function of language, which gives significance to thoughts and vocal sounds. It may perhaps be whimsical to see this diagram as reflecting the separation in Genesis Chapter 1 of the waters above from the waters below, with the firmament in between separating them, ensuring, in Sibbes's words, 'that one thing should be above another'.[18] However, the analogy which Saussure goes on to use would seem to fit the Genesis narrative:

> One might think of it as being like air in contact with water: changes in atmospheric pressure break up the surface of the water into series of divisions, i.e. waves. The correlation between thought and sound, and the union of the two, is like that.[19]

The image of air or wind making contact with water recalls the second verse of Genesis: 'And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.' The word 'Spirit' here translates the Hebrew *ruach*, which can signify breath, wind or spirit. God's breath moving over the shapeless mass precedes God's ordering speech – the next words of the passage are 'And God said' (Genesis 1:3).

Saussure in a sense agrees with Sibbes and with Genesis that the world is created by speech. For Saussure the system of language is prior to the conceptual order of the world we perceive. For Sibbes too, speech is prior to the world's order, but this is God's speech, which because of its intrinsic authority and power affects

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[17] Saussure, pp. 110-111 [p. 156].

[18] Sibbes, *A Description*, I:27.

[19] Saussure, p. 111 [p. 156].

real, and not merely conceptual, distinctions. For Saussure, the sign is arbitrary, but, as John Leonard reminds us, '"Arbitrary" is a slippery word for, as well as 'not based on the nature of things' (*OED* 3), it can mean 'dependent on the discretion of an arbiter … discretionary, not fixed' (*OED* 2).'[20] For Sibbes, distinctions are made by an authoritative arbiter.

Saussure sees the differentiating speech of the human speaker as construing the world – there is a raw reality out there but it cannot be comprehended except in so far as it is segmented into manageable units by speech. Sibbes sees the differentiating speech of the divine speaker as constructing the world. Contemporary philosophy often elides the construing and the constructing of reality, but in a Christian epistemology the distinction must be maintained.

This has a bearing on the early modern discussions of Adamic language, the original human language spoken by Adam and Eve before humanity fell. In the explorations of John Leonard and others these discussions often focus on Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis 2, where God brings the animals to Adam to name.[21] Many early modern commentators thought that this implied that Adam could perceive the essential nature of each creature and give it a name which corresponded to this nature. This reading of Genesis would suggest the desirability of a 'natural language' where words correspond to things, rather than a conventional language, where linguistic signs are assigned on the basis of custom, as in the understanding of language outlined by Saussure and, indeed, Augustine.

Saussure dismisses the discussion of whether language had a historical origin as 'not even a relevant question as far as linguistics is concerned',[22] but not before he has noted the powerful imaginative grip of the idea of a primordial naming of things:

> At any given period, however far back in time we go, a language is always an inheritance from the past. The initial assignment of names to things, establishing a contract between concepts and sound patterns, is an act we can conceive in the imagination, but no one has ever observed it taking place. The idea that it might have happened is suggested to us by our keen awareness of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign.[23]

Early modern discussions of linguistic origins are often preoccupied with the question of Adamic language, but this is not a preoccupation shared by Sibbes. By drawing attention to God's speech, Sibbes implicitly reminds us that speech did not begin with Adam. Adam's speech does not construct reality but construes the given reality – the reality which is *given*. The distinctions of Adam's speech are a recognition, a discernment or 'judgment' of the shape of the world created by the distinctions in God's speech. Sibbes thus pushes the origin of linguistic distinctions before Adam to God's speech in creation. Human speech and communication is a second-order thing.

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20 John Leonard, *Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1990), p. 5.

21 Leonard, *passim*; Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. James Fentress (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995).

22 Saussure, p. 72 [p. 105].

23 Saussure, pp. 71-72 [p. 105].

Furthermore, it seems to me that Sibbes gives us signposts that enable us to trace back the importance of differentiation even before God's differentiating speech in creation: 'Judgment is originally in God, who is the first truth and the first good.' [24] If we take 'judgment' to mean differentiation, this could be saying that differentiation, distinction, can be found in God, within God's own being. This is precisely what the doctrine of the Trinity teaches us.

Conjunction and difference

Language, as well as the world it represents, needs relation between different entities as well as distinction between them in order to cohere, to form a pattern which is meaningful to our apprehension. Saussure tells us that 'in a linguistic state everything depends upon relations.'[25] For Saussure, these relations between linguistic signs come from a never-ending web of verbal associations, such as syntactical relationships, whereby, syntactically speaking, any noun could be replaced by any other noun, or mental associations – the word 'supermarket' might make one think of 'baked beans'.[26]

Where Saussure speaks of 'relations', Sibbes speaks of 'conjunctions': the conjunctions of the body and the soul, of the church and Christ, of Christ's human and divine natures.[27] It is perhaps not accidental that this term which Sibbes uses theologically can be a grammatical one. (Conversely, the earliest citation given by the OED for 'conjunction' in a grammatical sense is in a theological context, the prologue to Wycliffe's Bible.) At the climax of his series of conjunctions, Sibbes tantalisingly says, 'In the Trinity there is a conjunction of three persons in one nature. That is a wondrous conjunction, but it belongs not to our present purpose.'[28] But further on in this work, Sibbes does develop his thoughts on the Trinity, chiefly in relation to Christ's enduement with the Spirit for his mission 'with a commission from heaven, from Father, Son, and Holy Ghost'.[29]

The church at which Sibbes preached in Cambridge is dedicated to the Holy Trinity, and Sibbes is a Trinitarian theologian. Ronald Frost, in the recent collection *The Devoted Life: An introduction to the Puritan classics*, notes that 'In particular [Sibbes] emphasized the inherent community of the Trinity, rather than follow the more common Reformed emphasis on God's simplicity and essential unity.'[30] Sibbes thus tends towards a social model of the Trinity, which stresses the communication between the three persons of the Godhead in an eternal communion of love. Communication requires both relation and distinction between persons, and it is from the interpersonal communication within God's own being that his communication outside of himself flows, as Sibbes says in a sermon published as

[24] Sibbes, *A Description*, I:27.

[25] Saussure, p. 121 [p. 170].

[26] Saussure, pp. 120-125 [170-175].

[27] Sibbes, *A Description*, I:6-7.

[28] Sibbes, *A Description*, I:7.

[29] Sibbes, *A Description*, I:26. See also I:17-20, which includes the interesting formulation that Christ in his divine nature gives the Spirit to his human nature, and so Christ as mediator is appointed by all three persons of the Trinity, including himself as the second person of the Trinity.

[30] Ronald N. Frost, '*The Bruised Reed* by Richard Sibbes (1577-1635)', in Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (eds), *The Devoted Life: An invitation to the Puritan classics* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 80.

The Successful Seeker:

> If God had not a communicative, spreading goodness, he would never have created the world. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were happy in themselves, and enjoyed one another before the world was. But that God delights to communicate and spread his goodness, there had never been a creation nor a redemption.[31]

Sibbes adds that 'thereupon comes all the subordination of one creature to another, and all to him'.[32] In other words, the distinctions between God and his creation and the distinctions between created beings, which give space for relation and communication, flow out of the goodness of God's relation-in-distinction.[33] It is this relation and distinction within God which provides the model for the relation of distinct human beings to one another through language.

This implies that distinction, such as is entailed in language, is a good. This counteracts some common understandings of creation and fall.[34] Platonic, psychoanalytic and existentialist readings of the story of the Fall,[35] found, for instance, in some Milton criticism and some twentieth century theology, often take it as a myth expressing the idea that our conscious identity as individuals involves a painful separation from a primal preconscious state of undifferentiated oneness.

For instance, Joan Webber's reading of *Paradise Lost* begins with this statement:

> Every epic is built on some basic assumptions about the nature of reality – that consciousness emerges out of an encompassing source which in varying degrees inhibits, threatens, or nourishes it; that a person cannot be recognizably human unless he differentiates himself from that source, but separation brings about alienated opposites where there once was wholeness; and that for human beings consciousness involves awareness of death.[36]

Webber reads the whole of *Paradise Lost* in this light. To be fair, she does make a distinction between 'Milton's God' who, she considers, 'is not a person or

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[31] Richard Sibbes, *The Successful Seeker*, in *Works*, VI:113.

[32] Sibbes, *Successful Seeker*, VI:113.

[33] *A Description of Christ* also outlines how our redemption involves being gathered up into the intra-Trinitarian communication.

[34] See James K.A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2000), for a provocative and stimulating argument, interacting with various philosophers and theologians, that the need for interpretation, and hence language, is not a consequence of the Fall but is part of the order of God's good creation.

[35] These streams of thought inform one another in complex ways. For instance, Julia Kristeva borrows the term *chora* from Plato's *Timaeus*. Likewise, Paul Tillich draws parallels between the Platonic story of the fall of the soul into the material world and his own existentialist theology which sees material existence as inherently fallen (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol II (London, James Nisbet, 1957), pp. 24, 33-34, 43).

[36] Joan Malory Webber, *Milton and the Epic Tradition* (Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 1979), p. 103. Webber's whole chapter on *Paradise Lost* (pp. 101-163) develops this reading of creation and fall, which seems to owe more to the psychoanalytic understanding of language developed by Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva than it does to the Bible or historic Christian orthodoxy.

character, but a direction and a force for life' and 'the orthodox Christian God'.[37] Thus Webber may be expounding Milton's non-Trinitarian cosmology rather than her own, but she still seems to assume, in her own discussion of the epic form, that differentiation from the whole amounts to alienation from the whole.

Mid twentieth century theologian Paul Tillich (using the categories of existentialist philosophy) likewise defends a version of the Fall in which the finite existence of the individual as distinct from the universal 'ground of being' inevitably involves alienation from reality as a whole:

> The motif of the myth of the transcendent Fall is the tragic-universal character of existence. The meaning of the myth is that the very constitution of existence implies the transition from essence to existence. The individual act of existential estrangement is not the isolated act of an isolated individual; it is an act of freedom which is imbedded, nevertheless, in the universal destiny of existence. In every individual act the estranged or fallen character of being actualises itself.[38]

Tillich's assertion that to be finite is to be fallen is arguably due to his inability to accept the idea of the Fall as an event in history.[39] If there was no state of perfection from which humanity fell, then imperfection, fallenness, must be built into human existence from the start. Creation and fall are thus inseparable:

> Creation and the Fall coincide in so far as there is no point in time and space in which created goodness was actualised and had existence. This is a necessary consequence of the rejection of the literal interpretation of the paradise story. There was no 'utopia' in the past, just as there will be no 'utopia' in the future. Actualised creation and estranged existence are identical. Only Biblical literalism has the theological right to deny this assertion.[40]

Thus, for Tillich, the very fact of existence which enables human beings to realise their potential inevitably entails imperfection, fallenness.

Some heterodox religious thinkers of the seventeenth century held a similar view – Theauraujohn Tany (a.k.a. Thomas Totney), wrote, 'Know that the fall is being created, for when we were not created, and uncome forth, we were as he is, that is in perfection.'[41] In Tillich's case, the belief that the existence of distinct free beings (such as humans) necessarily entails evil is arguably a consequence of his monistic understanding of God as an impersonal 'ground of being' which cannot reflect upon itself, rather than a personal being-in-relation, who includes distinction and communication within himself.

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[37] Webber, pp. 112-3.

[38] Tillich, *op. cit.,*p. 43. See pp. 33-90 for Tillich's development of this interpretation. 'The state of existence is the state of estrangement. Man is estranged from the ground of his being, from other beings, and from himself. The transition from essence to existence results in personal guilt and universal tragedy.' (p. 51).

[39] Martin Heidegger, likewise, says that 'Being-in-the-world is always fallen' (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, Harper and Row, 1962), p. 225, cited in Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation*, p. 97).

[40] Tillich, *op. cit.,* p. 50.

[41] Thomas Tany, *Theauraujohn His Theousori Apokolipikal; or, God's Light Declared in Mysteries* ([London], 1651), p. 12, cited in William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge, CUP, 2005), p. 18.

Something similar is at play in Julia Kristeva's idea of the fall into language. Kristeva borrows the term *chora* (which Plato uses in the *Timaeus* to refer to the primeval chaos which forms the womb/receptacle for the cosmos) to refer to a state of psycholinguistic development in which the infant experiences the world as an undifferentiated unity identified with the mother's body and not separate from the self. For Kristeva, the child's acquisition of self-conciousness as an individual corresponds with entry into the 'symbolic order' of language, which marks an alienation from the mother/world. [42] While Kristeva's theory is not itself intended as an exposition of the Biblical fall, literary critics sometimes read into the theology of the Fall the idea that language is inherently fallen because it entails individuation.

This is a misreading of the Biblical narrative, where the first sin is not a desire to be distinct but a desire to be autonomous.[43] The creational order spoken into being by God is differentiated: sea/sky, plants/animals, male/female. Creation has a unity of relation, not of homogeneity, which reflects and expresses the triune nature of the Creator. George Steiner has suggested 'that any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, that any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence.'[44] For Sibbes, as more recently for Kevin Vanhoozer, this underwriting divine presence is tripersonal in its shape.[45]

Christianity is not simply monotheistic. It is Trinitarian. Despite the influence, whether for good or ill, of Neoplatonism on much Christian thought, the Christian vision of our source of origin is not the One of Plotinus. It is the Three-in-One.

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[42] See Chapter 2, 'The semiotic *chora* ordering the drives', in Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York, Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 25–30. For a welcome attempt to summarise Kristeva's slippery concept of the *chora* in an accessible fashion, see Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (Routledge, 2003), pp. 18-23.

[43] James K.A. Smith suggests that original sin, far from being inherent in being finite beings, is expressed in the denial of our creaturely finitude: 'if interpretation is a constitutive aspect of human experience and being, then it is impossible to overcome (without becoming gods); and further, the desire to escape the finitude of human existence itself marks the essence of the Fall, the quest to "be like God."' (Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation*, p. 88.)

[44] George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is there anything* in *what we say?* (Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 3.

[45] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is there a meaning in this text?: The Bible, the reader, and the morality of literary knowledge* (Leicester, Apollos, 1998). See also Vern Sheridan Poythress, 'Why Must Our Hermeneutics Be Trinitarian?', *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10/1 (Spring 2006), 96-98. Reproduced at *http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_articles/2006Why.htm* (accessed 15/1/2008).

Old Man in Advent

Old man in Advent, watch the weeks go past,
count the moon down, sense how the tides are making;
feel, in the fall of sleep, or thrust of waking,
your heart´s appalling lurch towards its last
beating and breaking.

Calendar, cards, red candles on the sill –
despite your paper flesh and falling sinew,
keep the old rituals; there´s a child within you
pleading for hope, a young redeemer still
willing to win you.

Remembering life, remembering many days
endured in fretted patience, like an illness,
turn from that trouble, give your heart to stillness,
bring mind home from its traffickings, its ways
consumed in shrillness.

The world is strident with the noise of hate.
Fold headlines down, switch off the set, perceiving
the sempiternal din of guns and grieving.
Our souls are almost dead; then mark the date
and pray, believing

somewhere, somehow, beyond the printed strife,
the screened confusions, in a darkness lying,
bedded in straw, in some foul shippon lying,
something is born to bring your soul to life,
and ease your dying.

Walter Nash

Heresies

Walter Nash

A little theology is hard to digest, and too much is enough to put a simple pewman right off his faith – this is my first reaction. But here is an engaging book[1], lucidly written, benignly, often with humour, with a refusal to jump to easy, 'tidy' conclusions, and a competence of address that bespeaks the academic distinction and pastoral experience of its authors. In origin, it is a series of public sermons, 'a term-full', preached in Peterhouse Chapel, Cambridge. The choice of preachers suggests ecumenical design: eight Anglicans, two Roman Catholics, one Eastern Orthodox, one Quaker, all preaching to a prescribed format, each doing so in a distinctively personal style.

So well received was the original course, that two of the company, Ben Quash and Michael Ward, undertook an edition in book form, to be published simultaneously in Britain and the USA. In a Foreword, Professor Stanley Hauermas expresses a hope that the text in its liveliness and spirit will attract 'Christians and non-Christians alike who might want to know better what it is the Church has discovered we believe.' I demur only a little at 'non-Christians alike'. Who are these? Followers of other religions? Casual enquirers? The uncommon man in the street? Nothingarians? (Christmas-and-weddings people, I have myself been of that torpid sort.) I really cannot see it scratching the hide of a skintight atheist; but I am fairly sure that it will speak to the sensibilities and sympathies of the sincere agnostic.

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The theme is Heresy, which means choosing a doctrine for oneself, and by that choice, posing a threat to the coherence and cohesion, the very security, of orthodox teachings. The heretic's is the unsteady hand that rocks the doctrinal boat. In his editorial prologue, Ben Quash writes of the destabilising peril of heresy in general and heresies in particular. At the same time he freely concedes that heresies have had their uses: 'we have reason to be grateful to heresies, because they have forced us to think our belief out more thoroughly and more deeply. 'Heresies aren't *all* bad', he writes, and the concession is echoed by other contributors – 'Heresy can be a good thing', 'Most heresies look all right and have a degree of truth in them.' Heretics have seldom if ever been impious people, spurners of scripture; they have commonly been austere churchfolk, seeking zealously to refine the logic of faith, using scripture to highlight pertinent questions, pursuing dissent until reasonable doubt has become obsessive deviance. In most instances, history could well have given the deviant thinker a little leeway, but, as one contributor puts it, 'heresy is a category imposed by the victors'; it is being in the minority that defines the heretic. And yet, says the same contributor (the Eastern Orthodox churchman, Marcus Plested) 'the concept of heresy remains essential for distinguishing between an incorrect and a correct (at least, less incorrect) articulation of the faith.' Here's an engaging paradox: heresy rocks the boat, but heresy is needed to keep the vessel on course. A useful heresy corrects orthodoxy's bearings.

[1] Ben Quash and Michael Ward (eds.), *Heresies, and How to Avoid Them: Why it matters what Christians Believe*, SPCK & Hendrickson Books Inc., 148 pp., 2007, £10.99, pb., 978 0 28105 843 3

In his Epilogue, which rounds up the themes of the book, Michael Ward addresses the problems of orthodoxy. Problems yes; for if some heresies aren't *all* bad, some orthodoxies aren't *all that* good. Heresies may threaten to rock the doctrinal boat; orthodoxies, to shift metaphor, tend to slam the church door, always shutting someone out (or worse, in). What is at issue is, in the one case (heresy) the survival of the Church, united in one faith, one; in the other (orthodoxy) freedom to worship serenely without having to be fretfully on guard against lapses of mind, slips of the tongue, hidden reservations, thoughts unspoken. Such equanimity is hard to come by; to be at one's ease before God, to approach 'with confidence' is a state that priests seemingly take for granted and conscientious pewfolk uneasily pray to achieve.

Michael Ward devotes several pages to the discussion of modes of orthodoxy which are not *all that* good, in effect, distortions of principle. 'Orthodoxy is my doxy', said Bishop William Warburton, 'heterodoxy is another man's doxy', the mischievous wit of the remark depending on the 18th century street-canting sense of 'doxy' as 'mistress' (or something worse). Dr Ward defines six doxies, or bad versions of orthodoxy. One he calls 'negatively defined orthodoxy', that is, one offering 'freedom *from* error', rather than 'freedom *for* worship, a freedom for faith and hope and love'. Another is 'hyperorthodoxy', a protestation of every jot and tittle of doctrine, so stubborn that the protester will put scripture on the rack to have her way. This is a stern sort of doxy. Her soft counterpart is 'hypo-orthodoxy', a liberal mistress who reduces to the very minimum all dogmatic demands . She is not unrelated to 'lukewarmness', or 'excessive balance', as Ward calls the next harlot in line, a doxy of such unhelpful poise that no one can be certain what she asks, or if she really cares. Indifference in orthodoxy makes room for *hypocrisy*, the 'respectable' professing of lip service to canons of Christian belief and behaviour; Ward describes it as 'a recurrent and debilitating infection' in church life. Even worse than hypocrisy is *idolatry*, which assigns to *eidola*, 'phantoms', a respect that belongs to a higher reality; that is, busies itself with creeds and credal statements, rather than looking to God, for whose service the creeds were constructed. This is possibly the theologian's doxy – unless that title should be given to the last corruption on Dr Ward's list: 'barren intellectualism' – 'something to entertain academics and theologians, but without any purchase upon actual daily life'. To this self-accusation he has a good answer, one that has been ready and waiting through the whole of the book: 'Orthodoxy is of course a matter of the intellect, but not only of the intellect; it is also a matter of the will and the heart and the soul and the body – the whole person living out the truth of the gospel daily in thought, feeling, spirituality, and action'.

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Prologue and Epilogue, taken together, provide an excellent conspectus of the book; they summarise its positions, concerns, methods of argument, general stance. Between them come two sets of sermons – that is, sermons as essays and as chapters – on assigned themes. The first set, entitled Heresies of the Person of Christ, addresses the doctrine of Christ's divinity and humanity in one person, as implied in the Nicene Creed: *one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God … begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father… who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.* In the glad confident morning of Christological heresy, roughly from the second to the fifth centuries of our era, sometimes a little later, these propositions were the ground of a tough semasiological game, very seriously played, for the player might hope to bring the Church with him, winner take all. Against the orthodox who preached Christ as God and man in one person, there were those who denied His divine nature and spoke of a demiurge, or 'greater man' deputed by the Father to build the world; others saw in Him a nature wholly divine, only by illusion or 'seeming' to occupy a human body; others again, two natures in two separate bodies; and yet again, two natures intrinsically commingled in one body, its manliness coloured by its godliness in a human effect beyond humanity.

'We can never be entirely right in what we say about God', writes Michael Plested, 'but we can very easily be wrong.' These versions and aversions, of the Arian heresy, (Arius of Alexandria, 270-336), of Docetism, associated with Apollonarius of Laodicea (c.310 – c.390), of Nestorianism (Nestor, patriarch of Constantinople, 351-451), of Eutychianism, sometimes called Monophysitism (Eutyches of Constantinople, a monk, c.378 – 454), show how easily wrong we can be. These four heresies represent the close game, the chequerboard effect, of the debate on Sonship. Two further beliefs extend the theme to other perspectives. They are Theopaschitism and Adoptionism. Each is associated with the name of a proponent, but the proposer does not name the belief.

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Peter the Fuller, patriarch of Antioch (d.488) was a Monophysite who espoused the concept of Theopaschitism, that God, the one God, before all worlds, is not 'impassible' – unchanging from within, unchangeable from without, and thus immune to human affect; but can and does suffer in, and with, His creation. Michael Ward, who writes about Theopaschitism, remarks 'so widespread has this belief become over the course of the last hundred years or so that it's become the new orthodoxy'. Having lived through most of the last hundred years, I am well aware of God-on-the-Cross as the tragic *leitmotif* of an age that has included two world wars, the Holocaust, brutal dictatorships, and the steady collapse, amid the ludic optimism of progress, of whatever resembles a stable moral order. It is a tacit commonplace of modern literature, whether implying a view of God as helpless to save His creation, or expressing the comradely pity of stricken Man for his tortured Master. Dr Ward, in the methodical, epideictic progress of a long discourse, dismantles the perception that God suffers as God, and establishes the position that God *loves*; in either instance, suffering or loving, through the person of the incarnate Christ.

§

Adoptionism represents the man Jesus, born of woman into the human family, as being adopted by the Father at the moment, or shortly after, of his baptism in the Jordan, when 'all the people' had gone out into the wilderness to hear John the Baptist preach, and to question him concerning the Christ, the promised Messiah. 'Are you the Christ?' they asked him, and he told them, no such honour, a greater one comes after me. Jesus patiently waited, with others, to be baptised by John; after his immersion, came the Holy Spirit, 'in bodily form', like a dove, and a voice from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved son: in thee I am well pleased' (Luke 3:15-16, 21-22).

Rachel Muers refers to 'thickets of centuries of debate' which will 'take you in different directions depending on which version of Adoptionism the writer has decided to focus on'. She chooses to focus on the views of the 'later Adoptionists', sophisticated theologians typified by Elipandus, Archbishop of Toledo (717-802) who saw the events at the Jordan river as typifying a declension, or paradigm, of familial ties between God and Christ and Jesus and Man. By adopting the man Jesus, God lifts him into godliness, as Christ; and by thus raising the man, raises all the family of Man into kinship with God and Christ. From Jordan-day and ever after we are kin with the Father; we are accepted, and can accept ourselves; we have a glory in us. This is a view that Dr. Muers – a Quaker, it may be relevant to note – almost espouses, with the warmth and confidence, the familiar colloquial manner, of personal testimony, drawn from personal experience; *almost* espouses, while, in prudent caution, seemingly, she affirms the orthodox Trinitarian teaching about the Son. Hers is, I think, the only sermon in the book that leaves me a little unsure of where the preacher really stands.

§

The second set of sermon/addresses has for its collective title 'Heresies of the Church and Christian Living'. It brings a curious shift of perspective on the living relevance of heresies. Although the 'ecclesiological' heretics lived in more or less the same era as the Christological crew, they do not, somehow, seem so remote. Arius is long dead in Alexandria, and Apollonarius sleeps, I suppose, in Laodicea, but Pelagius is alive and well and living in Steeple Bumpstead, and there are Gnostics at the bottom of everyman′s garden.

Pelagianism is a good example of an ancient heresy that still persists, in dispersal, among modern people. Its founder was a Briton who spent most of his vocational life in Rome, until about the year 410 when the arrival of the Ostrogoths forced him to take refuge in North Africa, on [St] Augustine's patch. Pelagius denied the doctrine of original sin, and with it, therefore, the irreparable catastrophe of the Fall, the taking of the forbidden fruit in the paradise garden; and preached that human beings can take the first steps towards salvation by their own efforts, choosing the good by virtue of their created natures. He offered 'the power of positive action', or self-help, assisting Christ in His redemptive work by recognising and dealing with their imputed sins as they occur. This was the Pelagian package. Augustine of Hippo, proceeding, it appears, with the elaborately subversive courtesy of a faculty opponent in a doctoral disputation, relentlessly unpicked the package, as Dr Adams relates, defending and asserting the orthodox view of sin and grace. Pelagianism was thus stopped in its tracks in the 5th century. Nor did it find many takers in the later Middle Ages, for the Fall came to be celebrated as the *felix culpa,* the fortunate sin of Eve which presaged the coming of Mary, mother of the Redeemer:

> Al þis world was forlore
> Eva peccatrice
> Tyl our Lord was ybore
> *de te genetrice*;
> With Ave it went away,
> Þuster nyth, and comeз þe day
> salutis,
> Þe welle springet hut of þe
> virtutis.[2]

[2] The 'macaronic' verse is a stanza from an early Middle English Marian ('stella maris') lyric. The sense is: 'All this world was lost, through the sinner, Eve, till our Lord was born

At the present day, however, Pelagianism enjoys a residual acceptance, e.g. occasionally, among parents who can see nothing sinful, original or otherwise, about their newborn babes, and generally, among people in our businesslike and neurotic age who cannot bear the implications of original sin – that every right choice leads to a labyrinth of wrong consequences, that we are born to fail, that you can never *win*; and so prefer to make their own arrangements and pay their own way

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Angela Tilby tells the sad story of Marcion, 'a native of Sinope, on the Black Sea, a wealthy shipowner and son of a bishop', who died in about 160, in Rome where he had set up his own religious community, bringing upon himself the corrective sledgehammers of Iranaeus and Tertullian and other powerful censors. In what did he err? First, he viewed the God of the Old Testament as no better than a bad old man, vindictive, arbitrary, unjust, selectively dealing out death and dolours, even unto the third and fourth generation of those who got on the wrong side of him. Many people still have that uncomfortable perception. Marcion could not accept that the gentle Christ had any ancestral truck with this Israelitish turbulence. Consequently, he barred all talk of the law and the prophets from his New Testament (he was the first to use that name) even though, in the gospels, Jesus declares his intention to fulfil the law; and further, would admit as honest scripture only those parts of the New Testament not contaminated with Judaic conspiracy, for which he was naturally disposed to find ample evidence. It left him with a Testament consisting of St Luke's gospel, in an edited form, and the letters of St Paul, suitably purged of Hebraic references or inferences. This made a rather slender canon, but it was one designed to enhance Paul's message that 'the harvest of the Spirit is love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, and self-control. There is no law dealing with such things as these' (Paul, Galatians, 5:22-23). This doctrine, laudable among all right-thinking pewmen, is shadowed by something in Marcion rather less laudable, a virulent anti-Semitism, which seems to have been an aspect of his distaste for people in the flesh and their messy human ways – having bodies, getting married, coupling, bearing children. Reading Dr Tilby´s comments on him, I am reminded of Sartre's sentence, *L´enfer, c´est les autres,* 'Hell is other people'. Did Marcion feel that? If the key to his nature is a fastidiousness that cannot tolerate a fleshly presence, then Marcionism is around still, in many a suburban parish church.

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Ben Quash takes the story of Donatism, a 'schismatic heresy', with its origins in the persecution of the North African Church during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian (regn. 284-305). Diocles, a plebeian born, ascended by his own efforts to the imperial purple, as Diocletian, and then with the intention of making the worship of the god-emperor the supreme religion of his empire, racked and slew the Christians, however allowing some to survive by surrendering to him their property and treasures. Those who did this were known in the persecuted Church as *traditores*, 'traitors', literally 'hander-overs'. Felix of Aptunga had been

from you, his mother. With the word 'Hail!' black night receded, and the day of salvation comes. The wellspring of grace flows out of thee.' *Ave,* the first word of Gabriel's *Ave Maria,* announcing the Lord's coming to Mary; *Þuster,* dark, gloomy; *nyth* = nyht, 'night'. BM MS Egerton. Text here as printed in Bruce Dickins & R. M. Wilson, *Early Middle English Texts,* Bowes and Bowes, Cambridge 1951.

a *traditor*. When, a year or two after Diocletian´s death, with the resumption of normal ecclesiastical business, he proposed the consecration of one Caecilian as bishop of a new diocese at Carthage, his opponents denied the validity of a *traditor* consecration and put forward their own candidate, a man of impeccable ecclesiological purity, one Donatus.

This Donatist resistance threatened to bring about the complete secession of the African church from the catholic community at large. The secessionists, once victims of violence, turned to violence – in the name of purity – against the catholic church, its teachings, its priests, its very buildings, In Dr Quash's words, they 'refused to acknowledge the validity of catholic sacraments of any kind, not baptism, not the eucharist, not ordination, – *nothing* – because of what certain of its bishops were meant to have done under the persecutions in previous years.' Even Augustine of Hippo, exercising skills of reasoning and conciliation, went in danger of assault and physical injury. The Donatists simply found the catholic (small c) church corrupt and immoral.

There is no exact parallel, but something of a Donatist colour shows from time to time in quiet parish churches, when congregations murmur against the less than exemplary conduct and lifestyle of their priest. It occasions scandal, and raises the question, 'is a wrongdoing / bad-living priest a fit person to preside at the Eucharist? And the Church´s answer is the one Augustine gave to the African church, the answer now incorporated in the English church´s Articles of Religion XXVI (see *The Book of Common Prayer, 1662)* The message is emphatic: *forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name but in Christ´s*, the sacraments being *effectual, because of Christ's institution and promise, although they be ministered by evil men.* What the offender is as a man is irrelevant to what he does as a priest, because the elements of the sacrament are not his, but belong to Christ. The priest performs his office. (Whether he is allowed to stay in his benefice is another matter.)

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Two further ecclesiological heresies concern spiritual claims rather than doctrinal practices. Anders Bergquist discusses Gnosticism, in its Christian manifestation (it has its precursors in Greek and Oriental philosophy) definable as the aspiration to a higher spiritual knowledge, gained through rejection of the world and union with Christ in his divine being. To attain this, the adept must practise ascetic disciplines that release him from the clutches of an evil worldliness, for the physical world is the perverse handicraft of a malevolent workman, a demiurge, and follow the teachings of some authority professing the higher-than-ordinary truth, the 'inside story'. The substance of what was taught is revealed in a remarkable collection of Gnostic texts dating from the 4th century, and written in Coptic; in all, some 13 codices, and discovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. These tractates include the texts of gospels not in the traditional canon, and also contain a bewildering wealth of information and prescription, on creation myths, cosmologies, on a numerous company of celestial beings, on spiritual exercises to free the soul from the contaminating flesh, and more. Gnosticism, on this evidence, takes a disdainful view of the human world, and therefore (like Apollonarius, or Marcion), undervalues the saving grace of Christ who was made man and lived among us and died to redeem us. Gnostic redemption is the achievement of the enlightened soul, immersed in the *Pleroma*, the fullness of being, unconstrained by the material realm. The Church's hostility to such teachings may be imagined.

Gnosticism as eclectic and esoteric spirituality has its modern students (there is, for example, a Gnostic Society, accessible online) and also its modern practices, following the earthquake rule that strong versions are followed by weaker tremors. There is a certain amount of Gnostic talk, from sages of the dinner table or the lounge bar, who can always see more spiritual possibilities than meet an Archbishop's eye. There is a remnant of Gnostic pretension in secret societies like the Freemasons, whose arcane rituals enact the advancement of the spiritual postulant through higher and higher degrees of accumulating 'craft'. And of latter years there has been a market for quasi-Gnostic bamboozling, eagerly served by the pseudo-scholarship of books like *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail,* a compilation of such exquisitely documented taradiddle that a mildly critical reader can only say, if you will believe that, you will believe anything. But believing anything is what Gnosticism tends to require, as a condition of entry. It is dangerous, or best left alone. 'If you would be religious,' says one of the Cambridge Platonists (alas, I have forgotten which, it is so long since I was in Cambridge) 'be rational in your religion.'

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There is a flavour of religious irrationalism in the heresy of the Free Spirit, expounded by Professor Denys Turner in a fine essay, urbane, incisive, compassionate, and at times irresistibly witty (I laughed at, and am still relishing, this Roman Catholic theologian's Groucho-Marxist joke: 'I couldn't bear to be a member of a Church that wasn't corrupt enough to want me to be a member of it.' Precisely my position vis-à-vis the Anglican fold.) The heresy of the Free Spirit asserts 'that Christian perfection consists in the annihilation of one's will and its replacement by God's will'; it is represented in the writings of a 14th-century French mystic, Marguerite Porete, whose book, *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* was condemned by the Church, and who went to the stake in 1310, after refusing to withdraw it from circulation. The surrender of one's will to the will of God hardly looks like the substance of a heresy – do not we all wish it as we say the Lord's Prayer? But then the things we think we truly wish and clearly know are certainties that vanish in the trancing ambivalences of mystics and metaphysical poets. Their words speak to us daily, and every day we see them in a changed light. They say either too little for our comfort or too much for our comprehension. Denys Turner marvellously says of Marguerite´s book, 'it is like shot silk; its hue ever changes with the angle of refraction'. Wonderful; but her inquisitors were not looking for fluid prismatic visions, they wanted cut-and-dry stuff for kindling, and they found it.

The Mirror of Simple Souls, as summarised by Professor Turner, bears some resemblance to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, an English treatise from the 14th century, author unknown. In that work, the 'cloud' is a dense barrier between God and man, which can only be pierced or crossed by love – never by reason. The work is intended, the prologue explains, for those who are called to a contemplative life. Marguerite's *Mirror* also pitches against reason, in favour of love, and also calls the enlightened to a higher life of holiness. The book is a dialogue between Soul, Love and Reason, in which Love and Reason contest for the guidance of Soul, seeking the love of God. In the course of this debate, Marguerite distinguishes between two communities of religious experience, called 'Holy Church the Great', dedicated to the service of Love, and 'Holy Church the Less', given to the service of Reason, which directs the ordinary Christian discipline of services, sacraments, and good works. The lesser Church is the common province of all Christians, the greater Church the privilege of the blest who seek beyond the common pale. This comes close to proposing a two-tier Church, which the orthodoxy could hardly be expected to sanction. Worse, Marguerite allows herself to suggest that the soul, ascending in Love's perfection, may presently have no use for 'virtues' that 'enslave' the occupants of the lesser Church – i.e. the obligations of the common Christian to work and pray. The will to practise such 'virtues' will have been annihilated and replaced by a greater will. Like the Marxist state, the lesser Church will presumably 'wither away'. (This is what she seems to mean, but maybe she does not; in Professor Turner's phrase, the 'angle of refraction' keeps changing. There are just too many angles.)

Marguerite may not have needed her lesser Church. What she perhaps ignored was that the Church needs to be needed, by hook or by crook, as Denys Turner points out. It will make provision for itself by creating needs for the needy. It creates and satisfies the needs of churchfolk – the need for counsel, for admonition, for confession, the need for bread and wine, the need of forgiveness. So help me God, I cannot last long without taking communion and feeling the better for it – feeling pardoned, reassured, inexplicably *eased*. This is a fact of life; it may be grounded in a history of elaborate manipulation and deception, but it stands as my inescapable reality. It is what keeps me Christian. There are people who have told me, as Marguerite Porete might have told me, 'You can be a good Christian without going to church'. Ah, not for long, you can't. There is no room for that in my spiritual economy. For the poor man, of meagre belief, Free Spiritism is an unaffordable luxury.

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In the book's last chapter, Janet Martin Soskice addresses an error: for once, not a heretical error, but a faulty shape of orthodoxy, a 'doxy' that might answer to Dr Ward´s description of the 'hyperorthodox'. 'Biblical Trinitarianism' is her name for the process of seeking in Holy Scripture a supporting *locus*, a concise formulation, of what the Creed asserts about God in three persons. The word Trinity does not appear in the Bible; the doctrinal formula it represents has its credal root in Greek metaphysics, not in the law and the prophets of the Old Testament, and only by apostolic witness, inferentially, in the New. A medieval scribe, anxious to secure the scriptural credentials of the Trinity, might be excused for introducing, here or there, a few words of his own to make the purport of the text quite clear. And that is indeed what happened. The few summarising words – rather more than a few, actually, a *comma*, a large portion of a larger sentence, occurred in a manuscript of the 1st Letter of John, chapter 5 verse 7: *For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one….* This is the stretch of text known as the Johannine Comma.

In 1516, Desiderius Erasmus, preparing the first printed edition of the Greek New Testament, came across the Johannine Comma, spotted it for a fake, or one should rather say, detected a scribal gloss, and left these words out of his first edition. By the time of the third edition (1522) he was obliged to restore them, such had been the power of protest in the scholarly community. Thereafter, the Johannine Comma figured in all vernacular translations, notably the King James Bible of 1611 (where it may still be found) and held its position until well into the nineteenth century when accumulating assaults on orthodox belief – from the sciences, from 'the higher criticism', from the 'demythologising' of scripture – began to rattle comfortable faiths. Now the Johannine Comma became controversial again. It was 'without scholarly doubt a medieval interpolation, and it began to disappear from new editions and translations of the Bible.' For the ordinary faithful this was deeply unsettling. It raised a spectral implication that what had always been the real Bible was somehow no longer the proper Bible (or vice-versa). This was not the only instance of a doubt planted by a shaken text; there would be other such cases. But the particular doubt raised by the case of the Johannine Comma was this: if Scripture can show no evidence for it, how do we justify the doctrine of the Trinity, which is at the very heart of our faith?

Dr Soskice, in a virtuoso argument, rescues the Trinity as, historically, a tidied reflex of what early churchfolk, at prayer in the streets, were heard saying. Beyond that, she restores the voucher of Scripture, and confidence in Scripture, by pointing out that the Trinitarian implication does not depend on one passage, but is present in many, for those who will read sensitively and intelligently. The lesson is, cultivate a wider receptivity: do not look for the close harmonic between *sacra doctrina* and specific expressions in Scripture, look rather for an open resonance of the doctrine in places and passages throughout the Testament. As a supreme example she cites the Gospel according to St John, 1.14. 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth,' of which, she adds: 'No clearer statement of the Trinity is needed than this.'

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The book's nominal title, *Heresies,* has an appended coordinate, *and how to avoid them.* I am not sure of the stylistic wisdom of this. It has the glib promissory intimation of leaflet language or journo talk ('Your atheism and how to fix it', 'Avoid unpleasant odours with Zeal'). Such promises can only lead to the eventual realisation that there is no sure-fire cure, no certain avoidance. As for staying out of trouble – or not inviting it – I have long cherished the advice given me years ago by a university colleague, a theologian, 'Keep your bowels open, your gob shut, and say your prayers'; which I at first took for a Scots Presbyterian jest, but have since discovered to be a counsel of enduring wisdom, rightly considered. None of the contributors to *Heresies* gives quite such compact advice. It is in the convincing refutation of a heresy that they best show how to avoid it; the argument itself is the corrective prescription. Any lurking requirement for pastoral health-and-fitness tips they mostly find, I guess, a little embarrassing. They strongly recommend Bible study, using the whole Bible, not spot-verses or isolated texts; they speak of personal relationships with the risen Christ; they prescribe 'attentive participation in a worshipping community' (go to church regularly); they urge us to honour God's creation, and not to think meanly of our human state; at a push they suggest that we do not consciously try to avoid any particular heresy, because, as Anna Williams puts it, 'trying to avoid heresy may be like setting out down the street with the intention of not stepping on any cracks: it will not necessarily keep you from stepping on cracks....'('Heresies – just ignore them.')

Canon John Sweet, who writes on Docetism, provides a checklist of half a dozen good prescriptions for avoiding that particular heresy, with, in the last place, a commendation of Keats' famous 'negative capability': the capacity for 'being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'. That could be a good all-round defence, I would think, against easy capitulation to any heresy – but one awkwardly poised between indifference on the one hand and quietism on the other. General avoidance, by any means, is too hard. Nobody quite says that heresies are impossible to avoid (because, apart from anything else, they keep turning up in new, weakened forms, which might at a pinch be avoided), but finally there is a consensus that in Christian life, in its pilgrimage of fellowship, hope, and love, 'sidestepping the pitfalls of the heretics dwindles almost into insignificance' (Michael Ward, in his Epilogue).

Another crossword puzzle is the strapline on the title page, *Why it matters what Christians believe.* This is an opaque sentence, with embedded syntagmata: 'Christians believe', 'What Christians believe', 'It matters what Christians believe', and finally 'Why it matters what Christians believe', a quasi-statement implying a precedent question, 'Does it matter what Christians believe?' – and indeed, chapter by book chapter, it *does* matter to know what the Christian Church believes, or has come to believe, about Docetism, about Pelagianism, about Marcionism and the rest. Believing *about* is what the Church (big C) does, as explicated by its theological spokesmen. Believing *in*, or simply believing, is a lesser province; it is what the church (small c) does, or rather, what happens in church, fitfully, in the hearts and heads of parishioners. *How* do they believe, those people, how believe in who knows *what*? Maybe by taking a blind chance, a leap in the dark; or maybe by exerting *will to believe*, the will that comes from heaven knows where to stifle the unbelief – the disbelief – that shrouds the ritual texts. They say the words, perhaps resisting them in the head but making a stand in the heart; or in sporadic glimpses of meaning, believe with head and heart together. Language, in the practical sense of *usage*, is a continual problem. The incomer crossing the threshold of the church brings the usage of the market to mingle with the usage of mystery. It is what a good old friend of mine (the poet Laurie Bates) used to call *the lingua franca*; congregations understand it collectively, individuals puzzle with it separately. What keeps us together? We respond to the compelling rhythm of the service. At the Eucharist, when the priest says 'approach with confidence', we approach, confidently, take the wafer and the wine; and presently go out with God's blessing and into the warm sun, grief denied for a little longer, despair held off for a few more days, doubt at bay for another week. It is enough for once, enough for now, enough to be going on with. One really hasn't room for choice, or enough time to be a heretic. Blessed be God forever.

Book Reviews

Jesse M. Lander, ***Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England,*** **Cambridge University Press, 2006, x + 324 pp., £50, 978 0 52183 854 2**

Polemic certainly antedates the early modern period and the advent of print, but the 'invention' of the title is not too much of an exaggeration, given the exponential rise of such writing in the century between the accession of Elizabeth I and the Restoration. In this study Lander discusses some classics of Protestantism from the period – Foxe's *Acts and Monuments,* the Marprelate tracts, Donne's poetry and Milton's *Areopagitica*. Less obviously, the two quarto editions of *Hamlet,* and the brief history of Chelsea College each get a chapter. In some ways the Chelsea College chapter reveals most about Lander's thesis, which might be subtitled the Rise and Fall of Polemic. Chelsea College was founded as a home for polemic, a bit like a research institute, in the reign of James I, with his support. Despite its short and (financially) troubled existence, Lander argues that it was 'the institutional embodiment of polemic as a "public good", a form of writing that follows distinct procedures in pursuit of a robust defense of the English church and state'. Polemic, in this analysis, is not just a style of argument amongst many, and one that is less popular in the more collegiate, polite style of academia these days than it is up the rougher end of contemporary party politics, say. It was felt, for a time, to be a necessary way of defending and establishing truth, an adversarial style that defines a cultural and intellectual moment. So, for example, Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* comes to define not just a new kind of Protestant, apocalyptic history, but 'the polemicization of history'.

Equally original, though equally following in some recognizable footsteps, are the Marprelate tracts, an enduringly anonymous set of Presbyterian polemics of the Elizabethan period, whose playful, abusive and inventive attacks on the Bishops in general and the Book of Common Prayer in particular prove gloriously that what we characterize as grim Puritanism is a caricature. One of the best jokes of the first Marprelate tract is that it is only one hundredth of the size of the portentous tome it attacks, at a time when refutations usually outweighed the originals in an attempt at exhaustive critique. Lander shows more fully than before (perhaps there is an irony here) how Marprelate uses the material apparatus of the book, the title-page, the characteristic page layout of the humanist text, and even the misprint, as a central part of its polemic armoury.

Perhaps the most original of the chapters, though, is the treatment of the two quarto versions of *Hamlet,* where Lander convincingly points out a key religious distinction. Q1 (the so-called 'bad quarto'), he argues, is not simply a popular revenge play, and certainly not 'bad' in any moral sense. On the contrary, it is more orthodox in its Calvinist Christianity, and more hospitable to polemic language than the 'radical doubt' that informs the much longer Q2. Here is Lander on 'To be or not be': 'Q2 Hamlet moves from an almost automatic acceptance of the categories of the "everlasting" to a position of radical doubt; in contrast Q1 Hamlet's initial desire for self-dissolution is expressed in cosmic terms, yet in the soliloquy he comes to inhabit, however uncomfortably, a highly conventional religious structure.' Of course the more 'literary' Q2 has come to dominate the editions and performances we now have; and Lander sees this as symptomatic of the way in which the literary (and the polite) have come to dominate discourse since the seventeenth century. Lander is not the first to discuss these differences, but his thesis opens up a very fruitful reframing of them.

Two works of Donne actually published close to their composition, the prose *Pseudo-Martyr* and the poetic *Anniversaries* allow Lander to approach Donne in a way that sidesteps the current concentration on manuscript circulation. It reconfirms the received distinction between the poetic and the polemic, though; in the end he sees the *Anatomy* (one of the Anniversaries) as too radically sceptical to lie comfortably within polemic, which needs 'interpretive certitude' to function . Or crude thinking, we might say.

There is no avoiding *Areopagitica* in a book of this scope, though one could think of harsher texts from Milton's prose. Even so, Lander finds some more emollient later texts by Denton and Blount which attack the later Licensing Act of 1679 to provide an interesting contrast. On the other hand, he also finds Milton himself more suspicious of certainty on 'matters indifferent', and in doing so manages to map Milton's polemic manner in a useful way. This is not a revolutionary re-reading of this much discussed and celebrated text, but it does give us a nicely modulated account of how it does and doesn't celebrate the press, and the burgeoning intellectual and political networks that made Milton so optimistic in 1644.

Tackling such a subject as Lander's is not just a matter of doing literary history and criticism, old or new style. Jesse Lander is an adept in the history of the book, and knows enough Renaissance logic and Reformation theology to recognize some important distinctions in those areas, too. The discussion in Chapter One might scare off all but the adept, but there is a real contribution to several debates here, and this study opens up an illuminating perspective on some key aspects of the period. Lander is right to say that a new, more polite style of controversy becomes dominant at the end of the seventeenth century. Mind you, it could still be pretty rough in the hands of an angry satirist. However, the idea that polemic could be a truth-finding as well as a truth-telling strategy probably was in decline by then.

Roger Pooley

Mechthild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 34, Cambridge University Press, xi + 263 pp., 2005, £50 (US$ 90), 978 0 52185 541 9

It is arguable that hagiography was the most popular and enduring literary genre of the western Middle Ages. Its appeal was near universal: material in this genre was the entertainment of kings, devotional reading of the learned and the oral tradition of the illiterate. The material itself was democratic, featuring peasants as readily as kings, and overturning customary hierarchies of authority by the power God in his saints. Stories circulated orally of the saints' lives, holy deaths and miracles, and some were written down and preserved – in Latin and the vernaculars, prose or verse, in full-blown hagiographies or excerpted in martyrologies. Masses, litanies and sermons for use on their feast days preserved the memory of the saints. Key features of a saint's hagiography were depicted in art and sculpture. The study of medieval hagiography in its widest sense thus involves a wide range of disciplines.

For all the variety of the cultural forms in which hagiography appears, the genre tends towards uniformity; indeed, the personal characteristics of the saints were often elided in favour of a generalised sanctity. One of the many strengths of Gretsch's new book is that she perceives the numerous small indications of variety of intent and use within the work and milieu of a skilled preacher and hagiographer such as Ælfric. Prompted by the illustrations in the Benedictional of Bishop Ethelwold of *circa* 973, one of the most magnificent of late Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts, she traces the history, hagiography and cult of saints Gregory, Cuthbert, Benedict, Swithun and Ethelthryth from their earliest origins to their representation in Ælfric's work. She shows how Ælfric makes Gregory a preacher and the apostle of the English (in the process omitting all record of miracles and joining with others effectively to write Augustine of Canterbury out of the story of the conversion of the English); in Ælfric's homily Cuthbert is made into the foremost English saint (in the process nearly all localisation in time and place is omitted); and Ælfric makes Benedict the shaping spirit of the English church (recording nearly everything about him from Gregory's Life in the *Dialogues*).

It might at first sight look as if these are meagre results that could have been gained merely by comparing the sources, such as Bede and Gregory, with Ælfric's homilies. But that would be to underestimate the thoroughness of the investigation. Gretsch makes persistent pleas for proper historical scholarship (and accuracy – see the list of errors in scholarship on pp. 211–2), by which she means tracing all possible intermediate treatments of legends between the earliest sources and Ælfric. The point is that hagiography is peculiarly susceptible to change and development and it would be easy to attribute to Ælfric some tendency that had already featured in the hagiographical or liturgical tradition before him. The result is an often thrilling exploration of the manuscripts (extant and lost) and traditions of the chosen saints over the centuries from their origins to Ælfric.

The author is frank about some of the more tenuous connections she makes between the various materials. For example, she admits that 'no evidence has so far come to light, nor are there any historical reasons to suggest, that Cuthbert was culted widely, if at all, in Wessex during Alfred's reign' (p. 80). So she gives weight to writers who attribute to King Alfred a particular affection for the saint, and interprets the legends about Alfred being visited by Cuthbert in a vision in the light of that. Instead of an official Wessex cult, there are later traditions of Alfred's interest in the saint. The rigorist might be unwilling to follow the author here, in finding a place for Cuthbert in Wessex in the late ninth century, but the admittedly thin evidence is persuasively presented.

Gretsch's linguistic examination of Ælfric's homily on St Cuthbert arrives at two valuable and interesting conclusions: first, that the vernacular version can be demonstrated to be derived from the Latin metrical Life by Bede; and second, that Ælfric was aiming to reproduce in a limited way some of the quite difficult features of the Latin source. Overall she concludes that Ælfric's Life of Cuthbert was designed to invite 'meditation on the essence of the saintly life'. In contrast to the analysis of the language, this seems rather vague and insubstantial, as indeed does the earlier conclusion that the inclusion of all the animal miracles from Bede shows that 'Ælfric was attracted by the emotional appeal inherent in such miracle stories'. Ælfric also included many of Bede's nature miracles, such as Cuthbert's ability to stay the ravages of fire, to grow crops on his island, and to have timber delivered by the sea. It might be possible to see these miracles more theologically and practically as indicating the saint's control over nature. Gretsch interprets details from the homiletic version of Gregory's Life in contemporary terms, as Ælfric's 'attempts to rouse his contemporaries into resistance [against the Vikings], both spiritual and military, by providing them with models'. In Cuthbert's Life, his control over fire, disease and sea might have similar contemporary relevance when the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle mentions fire in London (982) and the habitual burning practised by the Vikings, cattle disease (first outbreak 986), and danger from the sea (Vikings) and a military debacle at sea (992). If Cuthbert was to be the 'pan-English' saint, there were probably people who wanted him to represent more than just saintliness; saints were there to help, as Mary did against the fire and ravaging of the Vikings at London in 994 (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 'E').

There are few typographical errors (pp. 28 'Evragius' for Evagrius, 75 'roots' for root, 121 an otiose full stop 10 lines up, 123 n. 216 '*Iudoci*' for *Iudoci*, 225 'morale' for moral, 234 the new paragraph begins with a sentence that makes no sense). Some translations are (to this reviewer) ugly: *on wisdome wel xeonde wæs* 'was doing fine with regard to wisdom/learning' (p. 148 n. 84), and *aræran ... ansund* 'resurrect ... integrally' (p. 226 n. 250). But this is a wide-ranging and fascinating study, adding significantly to our understanding of Ælfric's achievement, and also, on the way, to his context within the Benedictine Reform of the later tenth century.

Paul Cavill

A.D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, Yale University Press, £19.99, 432 pp., 2007, 978 0 300 11928 2

He being dead yet speaketh – and with what superlative force. *Shakespeare the Thinker*, posthumous publication of Oxford Professor of English and New College, Oxford, Tutor in English Tony Nuttall, who died very unexpectedly on January 24 2007, is the sort of critical account of a literary grandee, the grandest of literary grandees in this case, which anyone would love to have to his or her name by way of swansong. It is so wonderfully freighted with a lifetime's erudition and reading, it's argumentative force honed by years of biddable teaching experience.

The theme is Shakespeare the thinking poet and playwright, Shakespeare the ultra-intelligent writer (far more intelligent that Marlowe); a true sophisticate (none of your Warwickshire yokel for Nuttall); well-schooled in the Classics, the ancient poets, dramatists and thinkers, and in the thinkers of his own time; as bright as his brightest characters, never not thinking through them, never stopping thinking even when some of his greatest heroes prove to lack intelligence – as Othello and King Lear do. What Shakespeare's plays are thinking about – without remission, unstoppably; and almost always progressively, eschewing the regrettable rigidity of final conclusiveness – is, as Nuttall finds it easy to point out, the stuff of philosophy, the philosophy of Shakespeare's time, the ancient philosophies which preceded and moved it, and also (uncannily indeed) the philosophizing of the future. The allegation is that Shakespeare's plays are massively about ontology, especially the ontology of the imagination, about selfhood (subjectivity, identity, motive, causation – not least external causations of being and action: Iago shaping Othello, Coriolanus's mother motivating her son, for example); and about ethics and language. And not just the philosophizing of the plays, but, of course that of their author.

For Nuttall is a very strong anti-formalist critic. His Shakespeare is a real author, living in a real world, writing with personal investment about real-world concerns, using verbal and textual means which can't help but engage the *realia* of where real readers and audiences are. As earlier in his career, though now with the force of really matured convictions, Nuttall will have little or nothing of the mere imploding textualizings of any post-structuralist critical regime. Words, and so writing, are, for him, performatives. Plays (like novels) set real selves, real persons – *characters* – in motion. The reader and audience must do what Nuttall's *A New Mimesis* (1983) called *transparent* reading – reading through the text to the real persons and actions which it makes present; rather than opaque reading – readings satisfied with the mere mechanistic doings of the form. All of which Nuttall wonderfully exemplifies in this latest book.

Nuttall can respond to the performativity, the real presences of Shakespeare because, patently, he has such a real presence himself. He reads Shakespeare's witches and fish-man Caliban and bantering Beatrice through his strong memories of boyhood Herefordshire, with its 'cunning woman' of the village who wrote her cures out in a Herefordshire County Council school-exercise book, and a 'mermaid' exhibited in a booth at a Hereford fair, and big girls laughingly jeering at lads in the town park. Famously to be found with his daily lunchtime pint in Oxford's King's Arms hostelry, Nuttall recognises Shakespeare as a man at home in the pub. Hector's sudden volte-face about Helen in *Troilus* perhaps came about, Nuttall suggests, after Shakespeare 'adjourned to the pub for a heavy lunch'. Shakespeare must have picked up his knowledge of the Gnostic material that Nuttal believes informs *Measure for Measure* from Marlowe 'rambling on about this in some pub'.

A witty man himself, Nuttall is never afraid of the light touch. 'I name this ship the Baby Spice' is his favourite adaptation – it appears twice – of J.L. Austin's example of a performative utterance ('I name this ship the Mr Stalin' – or, 'the Queen Elizabeth'). *Love's Labour's Lost* shows Shakespeare afraid 'of premature articulateness'. The plot 'knot' to be untied at the end of fearfully knotty *Cymbeline* is 'one unknown to Lord Robert Baden-Powell' (patron of Boy Scout knot culture). It's part of Nuttall's massive appeal that his formidable scholarship, especially of the classical kind (he started off as an undergraduate Classicist), is always worn lightly. Small wonder Nuttall is appealed to by what he heralds as the 'buried learning' of Shakespeare – such as Shakespeare's knowledge of Suetonius' *Life of Julius Caesar* afforcing what he more patently took from Plutarch's one. (Plutarch in English translation, Suetonius in Latin: 'Et tu Brute?', not in Plutarch – the burst of Latin in Shakespeare's English play modelled on Suetonius's burst of Greek at the assassination point, *Kai, su teknon?*, 'You too, child?', with Shakespeare thus playing up the old allegation of parricide, which had Brutus as Caesar's natural son: all this, though, only for the well-read; the likes, of course, of Tony Nuttall.)

In some ways the breezy lightness makes for a knockabout criticism. Nuttall certainly likes knockabout. He riffs finely about beating or not beating servants – or waiters – on the back of his relish for the 'knock-about farce' in *Love's Labour's Lost* – in which, typically of Nuttall's way with Shakespeare, *Così Fan Tutte* meets the TV programme *Wife Swap*. He enjoys thinking about Petruchio duffing up his Kate. And he likes nothing better that flouting critical fashions and conventions and what he thinks of as silly current readings and stances of all sorts. He insists sharply on the heterosexual/marriage/procreation plot of Shakespeare's comedies – against the recent losing sight of all that in the foregrounding of the bigenderism, transvestisim, even gay imaginings which are also going on in those plays. He doesn't mind using now tabooed concepts, such as 'beautiful', to describe and praise a passage. He doesn't think Falstaff's lack of courage, his 'sceptical nominalism', is at all derisory: it's an intelligent response to war's horrors. Brutus is not 'rationalizing' his bloody design to kill Caesar in his 'It must be by his death' speech, but is there 'at his most intellectually honourable'. And so on.

Everywhere Nuttall the critic reads as an intelligent, thinking, down-to-earth human being. Sometimes, to be sure, he can sound a bit blokeish, but a realistic, human, humanist, even Judaeo-Christian consciousness is always, and most admirably, at work. It's what they practised so wonderfully in the new sixties Sussex English department – Christianized Nuttall, anguished Anglican Stephen Medcalf (who died a few months after Tony Nuttall, 17 September 2007), Jewish Laurence Lerner. It was – and is – a criticism which is fine-tuned aesthetically not in despite of, but because of the critic standing – Lutheranly almost – a stubborn mixture of good sense, ethical firmness, and a resistance to ever taking rubbish (rubbishy ideas, literary rubbish, critical rubbish) seriously. *Titus Andronicus* remains disgusting; hysterias (*Andronicus*'s, *Love's Labour's Lost's*, Richard the Second's) won't pass; Pastoral is infected by a central psychosis. And these powerful large positions are always grounded in the critic's ear and eye for the telling word and moment – the Third Plebeian saying 'Let him be Caesar' ('the most telling political moment in the history of drama'); the 'start' of Macbeth when he's told by the Weird Sisters that he'll be king thereafter ('The most economical feat of dramaturgy ever, the place where most is done in least time', stronger even than 'Let him be Caesar') – those places where questions of person and ethicity and politics converge. And it is part and parcel of this ear for the revelatory word that Nuttall unfashionably relishes Shakespeare's many 'anthology' set-pieces, his 'arias' as he calls them – Antony's speech over the dead Brutus, Duke Senior's speech on the green world he's arrived in, that sort of thing. And central to that ear is Nuttall's perpetual sensitivity to the flawed nuances, the sinister feel in the engrossing handshake of the rhetoric and the rhetorician.

Little escapes this reader. Except, perhaps, when it comes to the alleged Gnosticism of *Measure for Measure* in the argument which was made at a CLA Conference, as it happens, and appeared in *Glass* 16 (2003) as 'Measure for Measure: Shakespeare's Essay on Heresy', reproduced almost entire here, where Nuttall gets quite carried away by his old Gnosticism interests, overturns his good principle (after Ockham) of parsimonious explanation, as he turns Angelo into a redemptive figure, which involves, not least, ignoring the utter chaos of that plays's ending, the rather wild slapping of an attempted comic ending onto a would-be tragedy and satire gone horribly wrong. (But then Nuttall has long thought highly of Shakespeare's own tendency to unparsimoniousness). Still, this is a rare straying from the path of overwhelmingly good analysis – analysis which makes *Shakespeare the Thin*ker one of the most illuminating – and heartening – books on Shakespeare yet.

Valentine Cunningham

Benjamin Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, xiv + 209 pp., 2006, £52, 978 3 11018 938 0

Benjamin Myers commences his book with a confession that 'my own theological horizons are shaped principally by the traditions of Nicene trinitarianism and Reformed Protestantism'. It is precisely Myers's commitment to and erudition concerning the history of Christian thought that makes his study, in my opinion, one of the most worthwhile defences of Milton's theodicy to have emerged since the publication in 1982 of Dennis Danielson's groundbreaking *Milton's Good God*.

Rather than blithely consign Milton either to an orthodox or a heretical camp, a tendency in the current radical-conservative conflict among Milton scholars, Myers makes the vital qualification that Milton's approach is 'more complex, more variegated and more elusive'. Adopting the revisionist methodology of Richard A. Muller, Myers seeks to identify within Milton's thought-world points of theological continuity and discontinuity with patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation contexts. When he deems *Paradise Lost* a work of 'poetic theology', he also insists that his reading will not be an ideological cage to trap the poem; here, though, he protests a little too much. Myers's grasp of the transmission of post-Reformation doctrines and controversies is impressive, to say the least. The range and depth of his reading of seventeenth-century British and Continental theology enriches this study at every turn. He is able, in a few paragraphs, to unearth a neglected nugget of Protestant thought and to trace its origins and development: a theme such as God's 'conservation' of humanity and His 'upholding grace', the image of the quickening 'motions' of divine grace, or the now obscure doctrine of divine concurrence. Myers also renews apparently belated tenets by elucidating their legacy in nineteenth- and twentieth-century theology and by emphasising that tenet's place within the continuity of the Christian tradition and its present relevance in the writings of great theologians as various as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and T.F. Torrance.

Myers's first chapter, 'The Theology of Freedom: A Short History', is probably the least accessible portion of the work. Running to a little over fifty pages, nearly one third of the entire text, the chapter offers a brisk survey of the Christian debate over issues of divine and creaturely freedom in the writings of Augustine and Anselm; the late Medieval theologians Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham; the Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin; and Reformed orthodoxy and the Reformed heterodoxies of Arminianism and the lesser known Amyraldism. This conspectus culminates in an analysis of the predestinarianism of Milton's much-disputed theological treatise, *De Doctrina Christiana*. For the committed reader, the indebtedness of the treatise's formulation of predestination to its antecedent models becomes clear. For Myers, Milton emphasises the universality of grace, repudiates the concept of reprobation, refuses to concede the decree of predestination as an absolute decree, but instead as a decree contingent upon human choice before the Fall, and espouses resistible prevenient grace. Myers demonstrates the way in which the liberality of Milton's theology of freedom recognizes a synergy between God's liberating grace and the free acts of the human will. Myers perceptively underlines the fact that, in Milton's treatment of freedom, as in so many of his doctrinal formulations, the treatise 'draws eclectically on various concepts and traditions, and presses toward its own unique theological position'.

Turning to the poetry of *Paradise Lost* in his next chapter, 'The Satanic Theology of Freedom,' Myers first rescues the first two Books of the epic, both of which are set in Hell, from a 'Satanist' reading. These first two Books, by Myers's account, give us an indirect and unreliable impression of God from the perspective of the fallen angels. This God is a parody of the Deity of Calvinist theology, a reproduction of early modern anti-Calvinist polemic, and a divine absolutist who exercises arbitrary power and commands his subjects with a ruthless indifference. Although Stephen Fallon has already recognized this feature of diabolic rhetoric in Hell, Myers provides a more complete and detailed exposition. Thus fatalism is a devilish convenience, permitting the devils to perceive and exonerate themselves as God's doomed reprobates, without any choice in the matter. The devils' recreational musings and philosophisings on fixed fate, free will, and foreknowledge absolute are understood as a parody of 'the scholastic form of theological inquiry'. Satan represents the poem's first theologian and he promulgates a bad theology at that; he is also the first heretic and the first blasphemer. Myers neatly equates the Satanic predicament with the rationalizing tendencies of Ludwig Feuerbach in that Satan's view of God constitutes a projection of Satan's terminally warped consciousness. The quirks and errors of Satanic theologizing are necessary to the epic structure, Myers maintains, as they create a need for the poem's argument to justify the goodness of God, a burden of proof that it will be incumbent upon the remainder of Myers's study to sustain.

In his third chapter, 'Predestination and Freedom,' Myers focuses on the divine colloquy between the Father and the Son in Book 3 of the epic. Myers's illumination of this scene is, to a great extent, the basis for his study, the theology of freedom evinced in this scene having implications for and radiating into other essential aspects of the poem. One of the strengths of this section is its clarification of what has long been, in my reading of the poem, a major interpretative crux (*PL* 3.183-97). Here Myers defends God's words as comprising a declaration of the 'sheer universality of grace'. Where Reformed orthodox and Arminian theologies had held rigorously to a double predestination of the elect and the reprobate, Milton's God differentiates those Elect who receive enough grace as 'may suffice' from those 'chosen of peculiar grace / Elect above the rest', while yet upholding the possibility of universal election. Reprobation *per se*, the apostasy of those who reject offered grace, is an act of self-reprobation, where autonomous agents choose and actualise their own downfall. Another highlight is Myers's demonstration of how Milton's God transforms the language of ordination and decree, converting it from a divine into a creaturely initiative. Thus it is God's creatures who 'themselves ordaind thir fall' (*PL* 3.128) and who 'themselves decreed / Thir own revolt' (*PL* 3.116-17) so that they truly become authors to themselves in all. Myers provocatively suggests that, since humans and angels were uninfluenced by divine foreknowledge and intervention, creatures' 'volitional autonomy […] reaches back, as it were, even to the depths of eternity'.

We see to what extent Milton strives to secure his idea of the freedom and contingence of God's creation in the ensuing chapter on 'The Freedom of God'. Creation is founded upon the freedom of divine action. Because God, by self-definition, states that His 'goodness' is 'free / To act or not, Necessitie and Chance / Approach not mee' (*PL* 7.171-73), the inference is drawn that heavenly and mundane creation, without God's goodness, would never have occurred at all. Myers also offers a more nuanced reading of the epic's proffered 'cause' of the mundane creation. Myers shows how God's re-peopling of Heaven by creating humans to repair the detriment of the loss of the rebel angels is a liberal act of 'over-compensation' (102). Not only has the loss of the rebel angels left a still 'populous' Heaven largely unaffected, but also God 'can' and 'will' engender 'innumerable' humans (*PL* 7.152-56); both 'can' and 'will' are auxiliary verbs that indicate God's gracious volition. In keeping with this radical view of freedom, Myers happily defends an Arian, antitrinitarian model for Milton's Son. If the creatureliness of an Arian Son is granted, then it may be contended that it was neither necessary nor natural for God to have generated, begotten, or exalted the Son, nor for the Son to have offered to redeem humanity. Thus the Father's decision to redeem and the Son's acceptance of that undertaking are both contingent upon God the Father and his Son's goodness. Myers closes this section with a revaluation of Denis Saurat's analysis of the ontological retraction theory of Milton's God. For Myers, God undergoes an act of self-limitation and of withdrawal from Himself, to create living space for 'a radical "liberation" of creaturely reality'.

In the penultimate chapter, 'Human Freedom and the Fall', Milton's theology of freedom is seen to coalesce with Arminian thought. What Myers terms the contingent 'liberty of indifference', the possibility of choosing and actualising alternative choices, is defined as the prelapsarian human condition. Myers builds upon past Miltonists' portrayals of prelapsarian Eden as a place of trial and change, and as a site of volitional 'abundance' (*PL* 9.620) where exciting and diverse possibilities are made available to freely choosing humans. Milton's eschewal of any imputation of necessitarianism in his poetic theology is further explored in his angelology. Going against the Thomist, Augustinian, and orthodox Reformed accounts, where the unfallen angels, after the angelic fall, were believed to have proved themselves through their loyalty and to have been gifted by God with an unalterable state of obedience, Milton depicts angels as creatures who are perpetually upheld on the condition of their obedience. In the following section on hamartiology, the doctrine of sin, Myers corrects the Socinian and Pelagian readings of many Miltonists who attempt to ignore or to belittle the significance of sin in the epic. Milton's epic, Myers holds, presents a vision of corrosive and corrupting original sin that is avowedly Augustinian and in line with Reformed orthodox teaching. The chapter finishes by examining an intriguing paradox in Milton's version of the Fall, whereby the Fall, self-caused by humans through an abuse of their freedom, in turn enthralls their freedom. In this way 'Freedom is lost through freedom' and, in the words of C.S. Lewis, Adam and Eve have 'chosen to have no choice'.

In his final chapter, 'Grace, Conversion, and Freedom,' Myers elects to close his study on a jubilant note. He laments the immoderate critical focus within Milton studies upon the moment of the Fall at the expense of Milton's cardinal themes of 'obedience, restoration and grace'. Having established the pernicious presence of sin and the straitening human experience of enthralled freedom, Myers is in a position to oppose such negativity with the positive effects of God's prevenient grace, that is, of unsought-for grace that comes to humankind and makes the use of right reason available as an authentic possibility. In an incisive reading of the resonances between Adam and the Son's speeches, Myers reveals how Miltonic grace is fundamentally cooperative so that there are 'two sides of regeneration: the divine initiative, and the free human response'. It is a fitting chapter with which to bring the curtain down on one of the most convincing arguments propounded in recent times for the equity and the goodness of Milton's God. One leaves Myers's labour of love with an affirming sense that Myers is neither waxing hyperbolical nor overstating his case when he deems that 'The depth of [Milton's] commitment to freedom is itself the most striking and most original dimension of the poem's theology'.

Russell M. Hillier

John Milton, *Paradise Lost: an illustrated edition with an introduction by Philip Pullman* Oxford University Press, 369 pp., 2005, £16.99, 978 0 19 280619 2

Perhaps we should be grateful to Philip Pullman for this edition of Milton's epic. In the same way, as the film adaptation of *The Golden Compass* (*Northern Lights* in British bookshops), the first instalment of Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials*, reaches our cinema screens in all its visual splendour, Milton's influence upon Pullman's novels may, in the film's wake, be broadcast to a wider world. Although we should not expect a major resurgence of interest in Milton and Blake, we should anticipate at least a quiet ripple of approving recognition. This edition of *Paradise Lost* hardly aims to be a successor to the prodigious commentaries of Henry Todd, Richard Bentley, and, in our own era, Alastair Fowler. Pullman's contribution amounts to an introduction of a scant ten pages and a short prefatory paragraph to each of the poem's twelve books. To give Pullman his due, in an 'Afterword' he refers those readers who have been enthralled by Milton's lofty rhyme to persevere with the more scholarly annotated editions. Pullman's well-meaning goal and, I suspect, the publishers' ambitions, are to try to popularize the great early modern Protestant epic for the twenty-first century.

The inclusion of the illustrations to Jacob Tonson's 1688 first folio edition of *Paradise Lost*, each drawing accompanying its respective book, is a touch of elegance that should keep readers turning the pages (with any luck, only once they have read them). Pullman injects references to Alfred Hitchcock and Sherlock Holmes into his 'Introduction' that should help to stimulate the initiate reader's imagination. If the edition appeals at all to a seasoned reader of Milton, it is probably in anticipation of learning Pullman's take on the poem, but, sadly, there is little to intrigue on that score. The centre of attraction for Pullman is the figure of Satan and the humanistic elements of the poem. Consequently his discussion of the grandeur of Milton's Hell rapidly segues over ten books of the epic, skirting divine matters, into the human sorrow of Adam and Eve's expulsion at the climax to Book 12. Pullman's earliest memory of Milton, reading *Paradise Lost* in class during his school days, involves primarily the pleasure of encountering the verse itself, 'its incantatory quality'. He abhors the notion of students poring over the text's possible meaning, of 'turning the classroom into a torture-chamber'. A little textual criticism or background reading never amounted to the iron maiden or the rack, surely. One doesn't need to know everything there is to know about Dylan Thomas's 'Do not go gentle into that good night' or Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, but the knowledge that the former was a poetic exhortation to Thomas's dying, frail, and blind father and that the latter was composed shortly after Mahler's loss of his daughter Maria to scarlet fever should engage and subtilize our sympathies. In place of the apparent ordeal of research, Pullman substitutes the imaginative impression of Milton's poetry, the emotional effects of its 'magnificent and terrifying landscapes' and its sublime 'atmosphere'. No one would deny the vital qualities of the sound and texture of Milton's grand style; yet all of this smacks of the kind of vague quasi-Romanticism that Pullman offers as a religious remedy in his novels – his adolescent protagonists Lyra and Will frolicking in pastures green – the abandon of Wordsworthianism bereft of the wisdom and spirit of the universe.

Throughout Pullman's commentary there is that familiar tearing sound of sacred truths being ruined with zest. In Pullman's reading of the poem, Satan can do no wrong. For him, a reading of the epic should allow 'our interest in the [Satanic] protagonist to develop into admiration'. Satan's theriomorphosis, his transformation into a great serpent, 'is a pitiful comedown for a great romantic hero' (Preface to Book 10). This kind of shopworn Byronism, which transfigures Satan, Milton's first suicide, homicide, and genocide, into a dashing Promethean figure, a horned Derring doer, is best left to moulder in the attic. Pullman even wheels out the mummified thought that Milton was 'of the Devil's party without knowing it', omitting to mention, as commentators are wont to do, that Blake reserves this statement for a poem suspiciously entitled 'The Voice of the Devil'. Reader, beware. Even in Satan's absence from the poem for the middle third of the epic Pullman feels able somehow to argue for the omnipresence and importance of the fiend: 'there is no doubt who is dominating the narrative' (Preface to Book 5). With a deft flick of the wrist and a hey presto, Pullman produces another old chestnut that at the close of book 8 'Raphael blushes' (Preface to Book 8), when the verse roundly informs us that the angel answered, not with rubicund cheeks, but 'with a smile that glowd / Celestial rosie red' (*PL* 8.618-19). Pullman's God is of course pretty much that stale thing, Empson's God, a tyrannical Bully who is both 'petty and legalistic' (Preface to Book 5). According to Pullman, at the Heavenly Council God 'forecast[s] the fall of man […] in that unattractive whine we hear from children who, caught at a scene of mischief, seek at once to put the blame on someone else' (Preface to Book 3). How Pullman extracts the whine of a schoolboy ruffian from the stately, solemn intonations of Milton's God is anybody's guess. Perhaps Pullman would actually have benefited, while himself a schoolboy, from undergoing the torture of a spot of close reading.

In Milton's *Paradise Regain'd* there is a line spoken by Satan while he tempts Jesus with the learning of Athens. The Son, Satan argues, should seek to benefit in his evangelism from the acquisition of pagan learning because 'Error by his own arms is best evinc't' (*PR* 4.235). Pullman's fictions similarly inhabit myth in order to sabotage it from within. Perhaps this is why I find his admiration for Milton's poetry so peculiar. Let me now digress. Despite Pullman's lukewarm claims that he targets no specific faith, I find his appropriation and transformation of Milton's Son in *His Dark Materials* disturbing. Pullman's Christ-figure, the super-angel Metatron, has, to my knowledge, still to be discussed by critics. In Talmudic and Rabbinic tradition Metatron was thought to be a pre-eminent angel, if not a second deity. In 3 Enoch he is called the 'lesser Yahweh.' His Greek name Metatron, 'the one who sits next to' or 'after the throne' of God, inescapably conjures up the glorified Son of the New Testament and Milton's diffuse epic. Adapted to Pullman's fantasy, Metatron is 'man-shaped, man-sized', but, like Milton's Son, dazzling to behold (*The Amber Spyglass,* Scholastic Press, 2000, p. 417); he is 'a man in early middle age' (*Amber*, 418), aged around thirty-three, shall we say; he is dubbed as God-the Authority's 'Regent', much as Milton's Son is entitled God's 'vicegerent' (*PL* 10.56). Like the terrific Son of *Paradise Lost*'s sixth book, Metatron rides in a fiery triumphal chariot of paternal Deity, and when he attacks, he shoots down from the Empyrean, much as Milton's Son descends abruptly from the Heavens to judge Adam and Eve (*PL* 10.90-91, 337-41). Metatron, like the Son, was once incarnate, and he shares the same Lukan genealogy as Jesus, explaining that 'when I was a man I was known as Enoch, the sons of Jared, the son of Mahalel' etc. (*Amber*, 419; see Luke 3:23-38). In every way, though, Metatron is a perversion of Christ, a self-interested schemer, a usurper, and a sybarite. In his lustfulness, Metatron resembles more Milton's profligate devil Belial or those lurid Biblical Sons of God who coupled with the daughters of Cain (Genesis 6:1-7). Metatron himself was once 'one of the 'beings who had fallen in love with human women, with the daughters of men, so long ago' (*Amber*, 417). His weakness for the perfume and texture of female flesh and his confession that, smelling their bodies over great distances, he 'loved their flesh' (*Amber*, 419) evoke Milton's goblin Death, who at the Fall gluttonously 'snuffd the smell / Of mortal change on Earth' (*PL* X.272-73). As an amusing footnote, it is worth observing here that Pullman finds Lewis's Narnia Chronicles inappropriate for children. All in all, considering Pullman's fairly unsavoury handling of Milton's Son, I remain baffled as to the origin of his reverence for what is arguably the greatest Christian poem in the English language. I can only hope that this new edition of *Paradise Lost*, touted by Philip Pullman, the strangest and most unlikely of champions, will draw more readers to the truths of Milton's exceptional literature, and away from Pullman's 'Satanist' reading of Milton in both his criticism and his disenchanting fictions.

Russell M. Hillier

Kirstie Blair, *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*, Oxford English Monographs, pp. ix + 273, 2006, £56, 978 0 19 927394 2

The question of how to assess the somatic force of a text – its affective impact on our physical bodies – is an increasingly urgent one in a field of literary and religious studies more concerned with how to describe, analyse, quantify, footnote and calculate than with issues of how to feel the subject matter with which it is concerned. Discourses associated with the body in literary studies (sexuality, gender, medicine, for example) and also in theology (the crucifixion, Eucharist, incarnation) might be popular research areas but the problem of whether or not the critic him- or herself ever moves beyond the process of thinking remains. As a first step towards broaching this problem, much recent criticism on emotional literacy, feeling and bibliotherapy attempts to reconnect the body and mind, re-imagining the body as a map of wider ideological and social concerns. Blair's book is an excellent contribution to this movement, using the Victorian preoccupation with physiological and medical explanations of bodily processes to centralize the heart – as organ and metaphor – within Victorian poetry. Working through the countless literal and metaphorical embodiments of the heart in verse by Hopkins, Arnold, Tennyson, the Brownings and the Spasmodics, Blair argues that the Victorians, anxious that their work might not influence the feelings of their readers at all, compromise its representation. While the Romantics valued a sympathetic heart that drove the sensitized responses of the poet to the world, the Victorians transformed 'the positive associations of writing from the heart into something darker and more dubious'. Blair's distinction between Wordsworth's communal and consolatory 'one human heart' ('The Old Cumberland Beggar') and Arnold's unknowable and so isolating 'same heart' beating 'in every human breast!' ('The Buried Life') is a case in point. Where Wordsworth joins his readers in shared feeling, Arnold fears that the frail hearts of his readers cannot bear the weight of their own emotive response. The medicalization of heart disease coupled with the feminization of emotion as a sickness suffered by women and effeminate men threatened to strip the heart of its cultural power, rendering it little more than 'a cliché, a dead metaphor'. The heart responded, Blair sharply argues, by becoming more 'attention-seeking' in poetry, acting out within the text through its 'throbbings, palpitations, attacks and shocks'.

Yet the healthy heart was not lost to poetry, partly because the regulatory force of rhythm enabled a kind of measured reciprocity of feeling between poet and reader, held in balance by linguistic stresses. Drawing on Teresa Brennan's theory of affect, in which the body emits feelings into the air, which are picked up and absorbed by other bodies, Blair shows how challenging emotional bonds could be for hypochondriac Victorians. What if the feelings transmitted are bad and cause illness, a pathological response, heartbreak or even a loss of faith – they worried. Blair successfully tackles these questions in a number of ways, beginning with Victorian medical research into assessing the heartbeat (through the invention of the stethoscope and auscultation), cardiac disease and also the workings of blood circulation and then relating the parallel beatings of poetry to this enquiry.

'Shocks and Spasms' is a compelling chapter on rhythm and the pulse of verse, acting 'directly upon the heart, creating and hence embodying the effects it describes – a rapid, sluggish, or intermittent pulse, which in turn acts upon the circulation'. Spasmodic poetry dramatically enacts this through its rhythmically turbulent awkwardness, launching 'uncontrollable, unpredictable' details onto the page as if narrated by one caught amidst fitful seizure. No wonder poets feared for the state of their own hearts, as Blair suggests with reference to Barrett Browning and Arnold. But as Blair's exceptional final chapter demonstrates, it is Tennyson that really pathologizes the heart, distrusting as he does its redemption through human love or God. It is unclear, for example, whether or not the heart in both *In Memoriam* and *Maud* works against their speakers or with them, seemingly possessing an agency of its own. The former attempts to track the heart's progress from sickness to health via a 'healing religious and poetic scheme of regeneration', enabling the narrator's reconciliation with his own life and his relationship to God, and then offering this as a model of renewal to readers. *Maud*, however, is a far more diseased poem, the hero bemoaning his isolation both from his community and his own heart to the extent that he is forced to seek solace in war; instead of national pride and valour he finds only frenzy and alienation. The culture of the poetic and physical heart Blair traces, then, is at once eager to stabilize its tempo even as it falls prey to its own intense feeling, gradually surpassed by new interests in the nervous system and brain. Like the narrator of Hopkins' 'The Windhover' whose heart is 'in hiding' but continues to stir or be moved in a feat of 'mastery', the Victorians, Blair argues, struggled to retain faith in the heart even as they continued to centralize it in their culture as a symbol of and route to feeling.

Emma Mason

Kevin Mills, ***Approaching Apocalypse*****:** ***Unveiling Revelation in Victorian Writing*****, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 232 pp., 2007, $49.50, 978 0 8387 5627 0**

Those sartorial Victorians were, it seems, mostly wearing 'time-annihilating hats' – or so Mills argues in this brilliant and wide-ranging study of a time that was, as he says, a 'time after time.' These wonderful hats were first identified by that great sartorial thinker, Thomas Carlyle, and were designed to abolish all sense of temporal limit or structure, this being an era marked by the discovery that the world was far, far older than anyone had ever supposed. Suddenly it seemed that Man occupied a world without beginning, or at least Beginning; and, as Mills argues, once people thought that the world had only very gradually crept into existence they soon suspected that it would only ever gradually peter out. The grand narrative of time with its Beginning in Creation and Ending in Apocalypse was apparently abolished.

The time-annihilating hats had worked their magic; and if these hats didn't quite succeed in exploding cosmological time then, as Mills observes, that trick would be completed by one of the many time-machines that increasingly surrounded the Victorians, machines such as clocks, trains, and, indeed, refrigerators. Such machines were part of a world in which time was ruthlessly mechanised and thus made seemingly alterable, or contingent; the clock could be rewound, the train could eat up travel time, and the refrigerator (Mills' favourite, I feel) could slow the process of decay. Telling the great cosmological story of linear, orderly and end-directed time was suddenly very difficult. There was now no End in sight; it was, if you will, the End of the End.

To put this still more paradoxically, the loss of apocalypse was itself apocalyptic. Commenting on this irony, Mills (echoing Derrida) remarks that 'the apocalyptic always exceeds attempts to contain it' – it won't quite behave as it should; and, above all, won't quite go away when it should, even if you have your best Victorian hat on. And one reason it won't go way is that it gives structure and order to our otherwise chaotic experience of time, or at least so argues Mills in his study of 'the apocalyptic affinities of Victorian literature.'

Mills is not, however, interested in the obviously apocalyptic tone of much fin-de-siècle literature but rather the all-but inaudible echoes of Revelation that resound through such mid-Victorian texts as Dickens' *The Uncommercial Traveller*, Florence Nightingale's 'Cassandra,' Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and even Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. Mills admits that '*The Origin* may seem to be the last place one should look for apocalypse … conducting [as it does] scientific enquiries far removed from the kind of theological and teleological values that inhere in the apocalyptic mode'; however, after a brilliant chapter in which Mills locates all sorts of apocalyptic Darwinian moments we are thoroughly persuaded that '*The Origin* might be said to be the *last* place in which we *should* look for the apocalyptic.'
Apocalypse, it seems, is everywhere. But for Mills this is by no means simply a case of the spectre of religion haunting a newly secular culture but rather evidence of the intense ordering and policing of Victorian culture – Mills argues that the order which apocalyptic narrative could impose upon existence was quickly appropriated by the forces of urban capital. Time and again the New Jerusalem was re-imagined as the gleaming new Victorian city; in Mills' words, 'one can sense at such moments of capitalist confidence an appropriation of Biblical eschatology in the interests of the Victorian ideology of progress.'

This, though, is not the end of the Victorian story of apocalypse, since Mills goes on to argue that even as apocalypse covers up chaos so it thereby highlights that chaos. In this sense apocalypse is to be compared with the veil, that much-favoured garment within Victorian fiction which invariably announces, simply by the fact that it is being worn, the very secret it is supposed to hide. As Mills puts it, ‘the veil is itself a revelation’ and this is true, he argues, of not just the veil of silk that covers the face of the mysterious Victorian woman, but the veil of apocalypse that falls over the face of the chaotic Victorian world. For, as Mills demonstrates, this apocalyptic veil constantly draws attention to itself and, in so doing, frustrates any simple attempt to read through or beyond it; the veil of apocalypse thus points up the impossibility of ever simply knowing the world, of ever having direct and simple access to things. The student of Victorian apocalypse is thus left to read the veil itself, a veil that is, in part, ‘an epistemological veil.’ Mills is insistent that Victorian apocalypse is not merely a trick of ideology but also a fact of enormous hermeneutical importance.

And for Mills it is Christina Rossetti who most brilliantly realises this in her study of the book of Revelation; this much-neglected study is called *The Face of the Deep*, a title which betrays Rossetti’s acute conviction that she is doomed never to plumb the depths of Revelation but must instead forever skim its surface, abandoning any hope of a vertical plunge into the deep that is ‘true religion’ and instead reconciling herself to what Mills calls ‘a horizontal search for possible intertexts.’ What Rossetti offers is an horizontal apocalypse, an astonishing intertextual play of meaning that Mills brilliantly succeeds in mapping and indeed celebrating as he concludes that ‘deep calls to deep on the intertextual surface of Rossetti’s apocalypse.’

Mills wishes to celebrate such apocalypse because, above all, of its sheer (or even steep or deep?) humility in the face of the apocalyptic text, an interpretive humility that Mills sees as characteristic of not only Rossetti but Marie Corelli, Florence Nightingale and Charlotte Bronte. What Mills finds in these women writers is an apocalyptic vision untouched by a dream of mastery – whether that be a dream of mastering text or mastering world. Instead, these women offer a hesitant, diffident apocalypse that gestures towards not only what Nightingale calls ‘another order of society’ but what Valentine Cunningham calls ‘another kind of Christianity’, a Christianity without mastery, and without a clear idea of when the End will come, or indeed how, why, and (above all) *where*.

For Mills’ surprising insight is that this Other apocalypse is not so much temporal as spatial, a way of seeing the end of the world both from and indeed *in* the liminal spaces that were so often assigned to women. What Mills uncovers in the female Victorian apocalypse is, therefore, ‘a room at the end of the world,’ a room epitomised by the ‘red room’ to which the young and bleeding Jane Eyre is exiled at the very beginning of the novel that bears her name. Thus, for Mills, the red room is nothing less than an oblique take on the Biblical Apocalypse; for, as he writes, ‘the book of Revelation is [also] a bleeding edge at the extremity of the book – a canonical margin filled with blood.’

This stunning Millsean vision takes us a long way from not only traditional apocalypse but also conventional academic prose. And it should be noted that in *Approaching Apocalypse* Mills often eschews the masterful tone of the academy. In so doing he responds to Rossetti’s warning against ‘study[ing] the apocalypse out of idle curiosity,’ out of mere academic interest (if you will) or even advancement (we might add). Mills never forgets Rossetti’s insistence that ‘knowledge …is [not] of most importance to Bible students: grace is our paramount need; Divine grace.’

John Schad

Mark Knight and Emma Mason, ***Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction*****, OUP, 256 pp., 2006, £50.00, 978 0 19 927710 0**

This text provides an accessible introduction to the complex inter-relationships between literature and religion in the long nineteenth century without being reductive. Knight and Mason achieve this delicate balance by combining close readings of key novels and poems by authors including Dickens, Eliot, Hopkins, Rossetti and others, with detailed analyses of various expressions of Christianity – Dissent, Evangelicalism, Tractarianism, Catholicism and so on. They attempt 'to combine a thematic and chronological structure' that 'facilitates the clear introduction of complex theological ideas while simultaneously pointing to constructive and suggestive threads that cross over localized Christian traditions'.

In order to achieve this, they examine the diverse world of eighteenth-century religious dissent touching on figures such as John Wesley, Isaac Watts, Joseph Priestly and William Blake. They clearly indicate the ways in which traditions within dissent differ from the Anglican hierarchy of the established church. They also identify a key theme that characterises their discussion of the relationship between literature and religion throughout the book: the 'gradual secularization' of the 'art of protest' as 'political movements … emerge from dissenting religion'. Knight and Mason carefully resist the temptation to construct a simplistic narrative of gradual secularisation and religious decline in their treatment of the subject, but the tension between these two impulses frequently recurs in the course of their text.

The tendency towards secularisation is traced in the chapter on Unitarianism, which is explored through the writings of Coleridge, Richard Price, Mary Woolstonecraft, Anna Barbauld, James Martineau and Elizabeth Gaskell. This second chapter is helpful in the way it integrates a consideration of lesser known theologians and writers with key literary figures such as Wordsworth and Shelley. It contextualises the Romantic poets within their historical and cultural milieu, demonstrating how important Unitarianism was to the intellectual, emotional and religious development of Coleridge, among others. The potential inherent within the interdisciplinary approach that Mason and Knight employ is evidenced by their capacity to reverse this model of influence. Their reading of Gaskell's novels shows how she 'used the novel to promote an idea of faith … that valued reason and progress while recognizing the importance of heartfelt devotion'. This finds particular expression in her characterisation of clergymen and lovers.

Knight and Mason next consider the Oxford Movement, which they posit as a 'negative response' to the tendency of dissent (especially Unitarianism) to water down 'religion into a secular politics'. It is defined in contrast as 'adamantly doctrinaire, uncompromisingly ritualistic, and committed to a patristic religion founded as much in the texts of the Church Fathers as the Bible'. They underline the 'meticulously doctrinal' nature of the movement – a 'law … infused with intense and genuine religious feeling'. This treatment foregrounds the genre of poetry as a privileged medium that alone can offer 'an adequate outlet for the true believer's religious feelings'. John Keble is a key figure in this analysis, powerfully complemented by John Henry Newman. The chapter traces the impact of these figures on writers including Christina Rossetti and Gerald Manley Hopkins. It concludes by suggesting that Pater and Wilde, who shared the Movement's preoccupation with aestheticism and ritual, have a more complex relationship with its primarily religious impulse. Their work cannot be simplistically read as evidence that it 'collapsed into nothing more than gothic decadence and pagan sentimentality'. Nevertheless, differentiating 'divine feeling from the sensuality of human desire remains troublesome' even in the case of Gerald Manley Hopkins. The chapter concludes by noting that Tractarianism was socially active and motivated a number of 'charitable missions into the poorest areas of Britain's many cities' where 'volunteers would shower inner-city streets with floral reminders of God's vitality and presence in the world'.

The final three chapters examine Evangelicalism, secularisation and Catholicism. The authors make it clear at the start that the book is not structured according to a strict chronology; each chapter is built 'around a particular religious movement or tradition'. The inherent danger is that this may lead to the conclusion that 'certain religious movements were exclusive to certain periods' and 'for example … that Catholicism is the epitome of religious development' or 'Dissent is a movement that one grows out of over time'. If one keeps this in mind, the survey of religious traditions within each chapter offers important avenues for comparison and analysis. Evangelicalism is examined primarily through those who existed in a troubled tension with it: George Eliot, Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens. The complex interrelationship between the Bible and the novel is assessed and the authors conclude that it was the remarkable 'variation' characteristic of Evangelicals' readings of 'the Word that helps to explain how an apparently narrow movement was able to exert' the influence it did upon nineteenth-century culture.

The chapter on 'secularization' considers the strengths and weaknesses of the notion. It acknowledges revisionist analysis which has disrupted the paradigm, but also emphasises its historical veracity. The authors instead adopt an alterative approach and 'think about the ways in which Christianity adapted its form and message to engage with widespread cultural change.' This allows religion to continue to have a voice beyond the 'period when it was supposed to have fallen into dramatic decline'. Ghost stories offer a fruitful literary avenue when exploring the notion of 'secularization,' particularly Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, where the 'theological remnant … refuses to go away, despite the text's efforts to quantify and objectify the supernatural content of religion. But there can be no doubt that the cultural drive towards materialism evident in Dickens's text had consequences for religion'. This tightly argued and rewarding chapter concludes with Hardy's novel, *Jude the Obscure*, suggesting that Christianity *was* rewritten in the nineteenth century but it is difficult to know whether 'the result is best described as religious or secular'.

The final chapter picks up the trajectory within the Oxford Movement towards Catholicism in an analysis of Huysmans, Wilde and other Decadents. The authors argue that the tendency to dismiss this Catholicism 'as a mere pose' evidences a long-standing 'prejudicial anti-Catholicism' that ignores 'the diversity, nuance, and intellectual vitality of Catholic thought' seen especially in the poetry of Michael Field. They also consider the doctrine of creation and the influence of mysticism upon writers as diverse as W. B. Yeats and G. K. Chesterton. This diversity does not quite justify the use of 'religion' rather than 'Christianity' in the title, as the book does not move far beyond the borders of Christianity when exploring the relationship between religion and literature. However, it does offer a rich, accessible and carefully nuanced exploration of different Christian traditions within nineteenth-century Britain and the complex ways in which these intersect with the literature of the period.

Alison Searle

Walter Nash, *In Good Faith: Devotional Poems, 1997-2007*, Feather Books, Shrewsbury, 115pp., 2007, £5.75 from walnash@live.com, 978 1 84175 259 4

This short collection of poems by Walter Nash is loosely arranged in two parts: 'The Way to Pentecost' which follows the liturgical patterns of the Christian year in its thematic focus and structure; and 'A Broken Journey,' which is more disparate and variegated, but repeatedly returns to the experience of ageing.

The poems have a colloquial speech rhythm, which renders them easy to read, but frequently a turn of phrase, or unexpected break, catches the reader with its wry humour or poignant beauty. For example Joseph – a 'working father' with 'the patient face / of someone mute and simple' – by 'dogged decency becomes a saint' (17 – figures in parenthesis here are page numbers). The earthiness of the adjectives characterise the little-known carpenter of Nazareth with convincing precision; hallowed notions of sainthood are reconfigured by the 'trust' of one who 'leaves little trace / among the miracles and passions; dust / idles over his goings' (17). Similarly, the 'Lady, or a country lass' caring for her child is sketched in language that deliberately re-works the 'chipped', 'vacant, glossy face' of sentimental memorabilia. She is the 'likeness of a tender ghost' and 'her baby' as 'we were once' lies 'helpless, and fingering at the fringe of sleep' (22).

The liturgical poems are divided into four sections: From Advent to Christmas (10-26); From Epiphany to Lent (27-39); Eastertide (40-51); and Pentecost (52-8). The poems incorporate a variety of structures and approach from the sonnet ('Joseph,' 17) to a monologue in character ('Pilate,' 42-3), to FAQs (printed in *The Glass,* No. 18*)* in a catechismal format that ends with the experiential admonition 'Try' ('Faith FAQs,' 52), to the autobiographical-sounding reminiscences of 'Waking Late' (36-9). Some poems take their inspiration from direct exegesis on passages of Scripture. Others dramatise critical moments in the life of a Biblical character; 'Judas' is a memorable example, with its complex blend of self-interested persuasion and clever casuistry, as the divine imperative forms a convenient rationale for deception and betrayal.

> He betrayed me, you know;
> history is a liar if it says otherwise.
> when I put my hand in that dish
> and his eyes met my eyes,
> I knew his wish;
> the steady unblinking gaze that ordered: 'Go…
>
> I was betrayed. I. He betrayed me ('Judas', 44, printed in *The Glass* No 19).

There is also a deft, ironic play on newspaper reporting, which puts an unusual spin on familiar Biblical narratives, reinvoking their contemporary impact and critiquing aspects of our own news-obsessed media culture. So, in 'Reading the Heavies' (47), Jesus' crucifixion is re-imagined in the present as a series of newspaper headlines:

> Week One: "Christ on the Cross – We name and shame
> the Perpetrators of the Dreadful Act".
> Week Two: "Was it a Fake? A Doubt exists –
> We separate the Fable from the Fact".
> Week Three: "Analysis of 'Saviour's' Claim –
> 'No Afterlife', say Government Scientists".

The second part of the collection, 'A Broken Journey', is split into five sections, though the rationale behind their division appears to be topical rather than chronological: Remembrances (60-71); For a change (72-84); In the Master's memory (85-90); In good faith (91-105); and The Congregation (106-15). The section 'Remembrances' explores childhood memories and old age with an admixture of slap-stick comedy and poignant yearning. Shifts in religious allegiance are depicted wryly:

See me, as a child:
a Congregationalist,
and then a Baptist, then a Methodist;
when I became a man,
so help me God, I was an Anglican ('An upbringing', 61).

A moment with one's father in sunlight 'made a shining hour/ in the keeping of summer…. / I could wish for my hour again, / suddenly / a child once more, taking the hand of the rain, / blessing the fatherly love, the angelic shimmer' (66). Whilst old age is conjured up within the embrace of '*This old man, he played one'* – snoring, forgetfulness, incontinence, speech, pride, doubt, death – are all invoked before the poem concludes: '*This old man comes rolling home'* (70-1).

Ageing is the recurrent theme in the second half of the collection: the poems 'In the master's memory' form a contrast, focusing on key parables by Christ, providing an exegetical commentary that brings out their dramatic appeal and moral force. The mustard seed thus becomes a

Thought-seed, be planted where you may grow
grandly into a green domicile of poems,
the word's prolific weathering.
Let time declare you a tree of consequence,
your branches blest with conventicles of owls
or nightingales gathering ('Mustard Seed', 88).

The collection concludes with a lengthier poem in several parts entitled 'The Congregation,' which gives voice to various members of a small church group ('two or three are gathered') and the service provides the immediate context that grounds the diverse monologues until 'the priest commands: "Rise for the Creed", / at the command, as one, / we rise' (113). 'A Paternoster' for an 'Epilogue' and all is done, 'welling for ever / and ever. Amen' (115). The poems as a whole are variegated and fresh, provoking reflection, inciting devotion, and consistently honest about the challenge of living 'in good faith' as one grows older.

Alison Searle

John Vincent (ed,), **Mark Gospel of Action. Personal and Community Responses.** *SPCK, 211 pp. including index of Biblical and ancient texts, authors and subjects,* **2006, £14.99, 978 0 28105 831 0**

I assume that most of the readers of *The Glass* are Christians of an evangelical stamp and have been solidly tutored into reading Scripture with an eye to discerning the 'author's intention' behind the Biblical text. To achieve this laudable task we will have absorbed, to a greater or lesser extent, the tools available to the 'historico-grammatical' method. A high percentage of us will have consciously adopted this approach under the influence of those who taught us during our years in further education rather than drunk it in with our mother's milk, so to speak.

The purpose of this rather exhilarating volume is not so much to abandon this time-honoured approach, but to approach Scripture from a readerly perspective and leave the 'behind the text' question for other writers. It is the product of meetings held at the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield between 2003 and 2005. I can do no better than quote the purpose of these meetings:

> to assemble a selection of pieces on Mark's Gospel, written from a variety of different contemporary contexts, focusing on the ways that Mark's Gospel, or significant passages or elements in it, are seen 'at work', or as being 'used'. The emphasis is upon specific people, situations, communities and projects, within which there is an intentional or implied use of Marcan material or themes.

The considerable divide that exists amongst Biblical scholars is here laid bare. Many continue to adhere to the approach held to be more 'traditional', but is clearly the adoptive child of the 18th century Enlightenment. But many wish to move on from that approach, not necessarily abandoning it, but seeking to address a different set of questions, ones raised initially through a progressive engagement with liberation theology in its many guises. Not everyone is happy about this. From the conservative end, scholars argue that this will lead to relativism with readers employed in control-free eisegesis, making the text yield up results which it was never intended to but which suit the contemporary lust for relevance and application. Liberals see in it an attempt to vault G.E. Lessing's 'ugly ditch' between the ancient text and modern society. Once again, a superficial appeal to relevance is in view.

The present volume is an unapologetic attempt to get the reader to foreground action and response in their reading. It is not enough simply to read the text and understand it. A real attempt must be made to discover ways in which the text can be transformative in the lives of individuals and communities.

Part 1 of the book focuses upon the methodologies (inevitably plural!) employed. A collection of scholar-practitioners explores the ramifications of the more recent approaches, with a special view to practice and 'reception history' i.e. how the text has been appropriated through the Christian centuries. Part 2, endlessly fascinating and intriguing in the results thrown up, takes a variety of approaches to the subject of individual discipleship in the Gospel of Mark. Finally Part 3 examines political and community approaches.

It would be most unlikely that one could agree with every opinion expressed here. And it would be foolish to jettison the tried and tested methods of old. But John Vincent's book offers a range of possibilities that are stimulating and broadening. The main task facing interpreters of the Gospel of Mark today is how best these various approaches might be credibly integrated. Now that really is a task.

Robert Willoughby

J.D.G. Dunn, ***A New Perspective on Jesus. What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed.*** **SPCK, 2005, £10.99, pb., 978 0 28105 742 9**

In light of the plethora of 'literary', sociological and ideologically-freighted readings of the Gospels in recent decades, it is good to be able to report that scholarship has not completely abandoned one of its primary responsibilities, namely, to bear witness to and defend the historicity of the gospel accounts and their portrayal of historical Jesus. Of course scholars never totally lost sight of this vital concern, though some seemed to act as though it was a minority interest and essentially nowadays a lost cause. The so-called 'Quest for the Historical Jesus', begun over two hundred years ago, has received periodic shots in the arm. The 'New' or 'Second Quest', which flourished in the fifties and sixties, took the sayings of Jesus as their focus of interest and devotees hazarded educated guesses as to the probable authenticity of a saying, or even part of a saying, nay a word, and produced whole books of colour-coded diagrams which purported to guide the faithful in times of perplexity. Criteria for authenticity were drawn up which could be reasonably helpful in what they affirmed but very destructive in what they all-to-frequently sought to deny. In case anyone should too precipitately consign this approach to history, let me reassure you that it is alive and well and enthusiastically engaged in by the denizens of the 'Jesus Seminar' of the Society for Biblical Literature and articles and books continue to appear which offer reassurance or despair, depending upon your point of entry into such discussion.

Around twenty years ago a renewed movement, associated with names like Geza Vermes, Ed Sanders, Gerd Theissen, Ben Meyer, Anthony Harvey, Marcus Borg and numerous others, began to examine the historical Jesus from different viewpoints. Armed with newer materials culled from archaeological research and new insights into the cultural anthropology and history of first century Palestine, these scholars turned the primary focus of their attention away from the sayings of Jesus to what he might reasonably be believed to have done, given what we know about the times and the place. The title of Theissen's book, *The Shadow of the Galilean* (London: SCM, 1987), tells us everything: by looking at the shadow which a person makes, his sometimes dimly perceived effect on what lies around him, we can say a great deal about what that person must have been like and make educated guesses about what he can be believed to have done.

Now comes a brief treatment from James Dunn, Professor Emeritus of Divinity at the University of Durham, the title of which contains two provocative words – 'new' and 'missed'. One would expect nothing less from a scholar whose career has so consistently provoked both the conservative and the liberal wings of the church. For the one he is too liberal (though he has always aligned himself as a conservative), and for the other he is ridiculously conservative. In it Dunn contends that so far too little attention has been paid to the effect which Jesus had on his first followers rather than upon those who subsequently wrote about him. For Dunn the disciples' faith was evident from the very beginning. Dunn's second main point is that too little attention has been paid to the lasting effect of Jesus' impact upon an oral society.

Dunn has a three-fold thesis – that Jesus did have such an impact upon his first followers, that the mode of oral transmission meant that the original impact continued to be expressed, though admittedly to suit different situations and audiences, and finally that characteristic features of the tradition help give a clear indication of the impression made by Jesus on his first followers. For Dunn the old literary paradigms are outmoded. Instead he defends the reliability of the tradition, based upon oral tradition as foundational and formative of group identity. The 'corporate memory' of the first believers, he affirms, simply would not tolerate it if oral performance of the stories or sayings varied too much from the tradition. This tradition may have been firmly established even prior to the first Easter, asserts Dunn, though this overlooks the kind of dialogue which goes on between past and present in oral traditions.

Dunn is well aware that there may have been a measure of creativity exercised in the oral tradition, and he admits that from the first, several versions of the tradition may well have co-existed, but finds this 'uncomfortable'. Moreover he underestimates the creative role of the gospel writers in shaping the traditions which they received.

So, how much of what Dunn says is 'new'? Not a large amount, though the book does reflect contemporary issues in Jesus scholarship, and makes a significant contribution. By the same token it is somewhat misleading to claim that much of what is here has been 'missed' by others. It has been missed by some inevitably, but not by all. This volume is actually an excellent, up-to-date and lucid introduction to an important and disputed question in New Testament scholarship which should concern all Christians.

Robert Willoughby

Walter Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon of Human Achievement*, University of South Carolina Press, xv + 301pp., 2005, £28.95, Distributed in Europe by Eurospan 1 57003 578 4

Walter Brueggemann offers us a lengthy analysis of the 'canonical Solomon', considering a wide range of (mainly OT) texts which have 'genuine historical rootage' while being 'greatly enhanced by hyperbolic extravagance'.

The book appears as part of a long-running occasional series entitled 'Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament', and the editorial preface suggests that at least in part it is aimed at mediating the insights of Biblical studies to a wider world. In this it is at least partly successful: much space is taken up with lengthy reviews of OT scholarship, often demonstrating Brueggemann's exhaustive grasp of the options, and tracking the general drift away from historical concerns over the past 70 years since the time of von Rad. The resultant interpretative approach, however, seems to vacillate uneasily between points made by way of historical reconstruction, and points made with a confidence that historical reconstruction is neither possible nor necessary. Thus on the one hand Brueggemann will pursue contemporary scholarship's linking of the final form of the Pentateuch with the Persian period in order to illustrate a point, while elsewhere he will say that we cannot have historical access to the subject matter of the texts. In one extraordinary case, he reads Psalm 73 as if we meet Solomon there: 'the speaker of Psalm 73:19-28 is a chastened Solomon', and this is simply on the basis that Solomon's name appears in the superscript of Psalm 72, and ignoring the occurrence of Asaph in Ps.73's superscript. His attempt to head off the claim that this is 'all extrapolation' is unconvincing.

Nevertheless, though one may have doubts about the clarity of hermeneutical focus, the project overall offers a suggestive reading of many aspects of the canonical Solomon. Brueggemann reads three key portraits in the primary narratives of 1 Kings 3-11: Solomon as temple builder, wise king and economic genius, and characterises these as 'an act of sustained, constructive imagination'. Against these, he sets the Deuteronomistic critique of kingship (and implicitly of Solomon), and here some of his familiar themes come strongly to the fore: the issue, he says, is not regard to facts, but 'is between a theological vision (ideology) that intends to subvert the celebrated claims of Solomon, and the ideology upon which these claims are premised.' Subsequent chapters, to my mind, drift off the topic slightly, reviewing Solomon in Chronicles, in connection with Proverbs, in 'Canonical Extrapolation' (i.e. in Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs), in the Psalms, in later traditions (including the Qu'ran and the temple-building of the freemasons), and (too briefly) in the New Testament. Often these chapters rehearse overviews and critical issues and then acknowledge that not much pertains to Solomon.

What of the main focus: a reading attuned to irony? It is slightly disconcerting to read at the beginning that 'it is not necessary for us to articulate a refined theory of irony in order to signal ironic dimensions of the Biblical presentation of Solomon', and indeed the literary framework in view is loose, with a nod to Wayne Booth, and otherwise content simply to presuppose and then repeatedly underline the presence of the ironic. This is a little vague, and when one encounters the chapter on Chronicles and reads that 'there is no critical counterpoint within the text and therefore no playful irony upon which the interpreter can capitalize', the question does recur: on what basis is one fairly to conclude that irony is any kind of key to these narratives in the first place? 1 Kings 3 offers rich possibilities, and some of them surface in various places in this book, but Brueggemann seems committed to the view that the mode of irony is to be either found or brought to bear everywhere, with the result that the strange ambiguities regarding Solomon's wisdom in 1 Kings 3 lose some of their focus.

Brueggemann's general grasp of the socio-political dynamics which suffuse Biblical texts ensure that this study is rarely dull and offers many thought-provoking reflections on power, literary texts as vehicles of the transmission of (state-sponsored) ideology, and on the various theological visions which co-exist in the canon. The focus on the ironic does not seem to unlock these, and the absence of any kind of concluding reflection or assessment of the efficacy of reading ironically leaves the overall book with something of a 'survey' feel, with as many questions up in the air as there are insights on the ground.

Richard Briggs

Craig Raine, *T.S. Eliot*, OUP, 202 pp., 2007, £12.99, 978 0 19530 993 5

Since his death in 1965 T.S. Eliot's reputation has undergone various reassessments. New documents, notably the draft typescript of *The Waste Land*, have been discovered, and Eliot, his life and work, has provided grist to the mills of, amongst others, new historicists, post-Marxists and postmodernists. Eliot studies, while cramped by the over-cautious (and often downright uncooperative) policy of Valerie Eliot who presides over the literary estate, nevertheless flourish.

Craig Raine, who once worked as poetry editor at Faber & Faber, where Eliot had previously been the director running poetry, is now an English don at New College, Oxford, and is himself a poet. Eliot had much to say in favour of 'practitioner criticism', in other words poets writing about other poets' writing. Raine's poems bear unmistakeable signs of Eliot's influence ('We writers frequently inherit our themes from our most admired predecessors'), which is all to the good since this book shows that he is an excellent reader of Eliot. It's a pity, though, about the sycophantic dedication to Valerie Eliot; but who knows who will succeed her as executor of the literary estate – Christopher Ricks maybe, or might Raine be in the running? As a reader of Eliot Raine does not much trouble himself with critical schools and theories which bear at best obliquely on Eliot's achievement.

Instead he engages with some key poems, including *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, and selectively with the drama and prose, with side glances at, for example, Henry James, Flaubert, Joyce and Chekhov. He disdains laborious description and comprehensive analysis, preferring to elucidate themes and images so as to present aspects of the poems many readers will not have noticed. He is an admirer of Eliot's 'unsleeping linguistic alertness', saying that he has 'tried to do local justice to Eliot's genius at the level of the word, the phrase and the passage'. 'Gerontion' is about the failure to live, the History it personifies is perverse and contrarian. Gerontion is a 'voluptuary of inaction'. The poem is in places 'baffling'. He quotes

> [History] gives too late
> What's not believed in, or if still believed,
> In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon
> Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
> Till the refusal propagates a fear

and comments: 'Eh? We need to know what's *what* in "what's thought can be dispensed with" or the sentence is opaque. And the "what" is withheld.' Or, referring to the line 'I that was near your heart was removed therefrom' he notices 'the pedantry of "therefrom" – and its tiny cough in ink [as] a perfect touch of chracterisation.'

Eliot believed that poetry proceeds from the poet's emotions, which he 'fuses' in a controlled artistic process to make a poem. At the same time he deplored 'excess of emotion', identifying such excess with romanticism. He famously declared himself a 'classicist in literature', a position Raine argues was consciously anti-romantic, and rationalist, owing much to his Harvard teachers and to French writers such as Julien Benda and Pierre Lasserre. In *The Criterion* (Oct. 1923) Eliot wrote:

> The romantic is deficient or undeveloped in his ability to distinguish between fact and fantasy, whereas the classicist, or adult mind, is thoroughly realist – without illusions, without daydreams, without hope, without bitterness, and with abundant resignation.

But unusual quotidian emotions, unusual at that time in poetry, provide some of the raw material for Eliot's poems – embarrassment in 'Hysteria' and, in 'Dans Le Restaurant', tedium and disgust juxtaposed with the visionary.

Raine makes a thematic link between *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* :

> *The Waste Land* is predicated on an implicit, unstated assumption – the simultaneity of time … [His] purpose, in 433 lines, is to re-create history itself, via his swarming largely anonymous voices.

> In *Four Quartets* there are several kinds of time, but the main ones are three. First, normal sequential time by which we all live; second, unalterable, simultaneous time; third, mystical experience, which takes place outside all time, but can only be remembered *in* time, what Eliot in *The Dry Salvages* section V calls 'The point of

> intersection of the timeless / With time'.

When he writes that 'All time is unredeemable' Eliot means that it is unchangeable. Moreover past, present and future are all eternally present to God.

Raine pays some attention to Christian themes in Eliot. He explains that *The Hollow Men* is set in Dante's limbo. But where others might consider *The Waste Land* as a kind of *Inferno* and *Four Quartets* as approximately Eliot's *Paradiso*, Raine finds Christian matter enough in Eliot's 'most difficult poem', *Ash Wednesday*. 'It is a poem about the difficulty of religious belief, about the difficulty of renouncing the temporal world.' Eliot, the advocate of impersonality, is at his most personal in this poem, despairingly giving up the hope of turning again. Raine explicates this as an inability to return to the past, and an absence of hope for the future, relating it to the invocation in *East Coker* of the *via negativa*.

Raine's Eliot is a genius whose work is not beyond criticism. *Four Quartets* is 'candidly prosaic' in places. There's an elementary tautology in the 'anxious worried women' in Section I of *The Dry Salvages*. The literary reflections in *Little Gidding* section V are 'attenuated and mechanical … and not much better than the advice you might expect in a superior creative writing class.' The world of *The Family Reunion* is 'rarified and somewhat depleted'. But *Four Quartets*, addressing the problem of mystical experience, in and out of time, is 'as radical as anything he wrote'.

A motif running through much of Eliot's poetry is the buried life. It takes many forms, but often gestures towards what might have been. 'Animula' is about a life, a soul 'corroded by its own caution … disfigured and distorted, rusty with reluctance.'

> Issues from the hand of time the simple soul
> Irresolute and selfish, misshapen, lame,
> Unable to fare forward or retreat
> Fearing the warm reality, the offered good,
> Denying the importunity of the blood,
> Shadow of its own shadows, spectre in its own gloom,
> Leaving disordered papers in a dusty room.

In the closing lines of the poem Eliot subverts the traditional preference for the contemplative life, with explosive allusions to men of violence ('Pray for / Boudin, blown to pieces'). In his essay on Baudelaire he remarked that it might be 'better to do evil … than to do nothing'. In *Four Quartets* the buried life is manifest in different ways. The 'strong brown god' of the river, for example, 'present in the nursery bedroom'. When he was composing *Little Gidding* Eliot would consult John Hayward and show him drafts, as he had shown *The Waste Land* to Ezra Pound. He mentioned to Hayward an idea that he might introduce 'some acute personal reminiscence (never to be explicated, of course, but to give power from below the surface)'. We might think of other writers who adopt such a technique. Lucy Honeychurch in Forster's *A Room with a View* faints in the Piazza Signoria in Florence. She has witnessed a street murder, glancingly described, which evokes in her strange and private emotions scarcely related to what took place.

The epithet 'buried life' was from Matthew Arnold, who used it to describe the failure to realise one's emotional potential when the business of living supplants the cultivation of the inner life. Raine is good on Eliot's 'best enemies' relation to Arnold, with whom he often took issue, but to whom he was indebted for numerous working ideas. Arnold's catchphrases: sweetness and light, Hellenism, Hebraism and so on are compared with Eliot's: the objective correlative, the auditory imagination, the dissociation of sensibility. Eliot's mystification with these terms may have been better for his reputation, Raine suggests, than the perspicuity of Arnold was for his.

> When Eliot coins the neologism 'polyphiloprogenitive' in 'Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service', we recall Arnold's 'philoprogenitiveness' in 'Our Liberal Practitioners'. Would Eliot have written *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* without the prior example of *Culture and Anarchy*? Or 'The Function of Criticism' without Arnold's 'The Function of Criticism'? Their relationship is situated uncomfortably between conversation and argument.

On the charges of anti-Semitism Raine rightly argues for Eliot's innocence. Certainly he made use of some common prejudices in his writings, but there was never any personal commitment to ideological racism of the kind imputed to him by Anthony Julius and others. 'In the eyes of the Church, to be anti-Semitic is a sin,' Eliot is reported to have said. Raine points out that Burbank's anti-Semitism is the character's own, not Eliot's, being a posture with a cigar, following Bleistein's success, and Burbank's failure, with Princess Volupine. Raine's twenty-nine pages of discussion are comprehensive. Circumspectly he withholds final judgement. Some correspondence has yet to be published, could there yet be disordered papers to reveal what has been buried?

Roger Kojecký

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to Dr Terence Clifford-Amos and Dr Michael Ward for help with the copy editing of this issue.