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Quiet Fulness: Divine Symbolism in C.S. Lewis's Theory and Practice <i>Michael Ward</i>	3
Unveiled Faces: God and Self in C.S. Lewis <i>Sharon Jebb</i>	11
Hosea and the Disintegration of Narrative <i>Cedric Porter</i>	20
A Tale of a Trope: <i>Ubi Sunt</i> and its Analogues in English Verse <i>Walter Nash</i>	25
Reviews	35
Anthony C. Swindell, <i>How Contemporary Novelists Rewrite Stories from the Bible: The Interpretation of Scripture in Literature</i>	
Deborah C. Bowen, <i>Stories of the Middle Space: Reading the Ethics of Postmodern Realisms</i>	
Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, <i>The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic After 9/11</i>	
Philip Pullman, <i>The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ</i>	
Richard Holloway, <i>Between the Monster and the Saint: Reflections on the Human Condition</i>	
Barry Spurr, 'Anglo-Catholic in Religion': T.S. Eliot and Christianity	
Kevin J. Vanhoozer, <i>Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship</i>	
<i>The Sidney Psalter: The Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney</i> , eds. Hannibal Hamlin, Michael G. Brennan, Margaret P. Hannay, and Noel Kinnamon	
Jerry Root, <i>C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An investigation of a pervasive theme</i>	
David C. Mahan, <i>An Unexpected Light: Theology and Witness in the Poetry and Thought of Charles Williams, Micheal O'Siadhail and Geoffrey Hill</i>	
Christopher Bush, <i>Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, Media</i>	
Poems by C.S. Lewis, Ruth Pitter, Elizabeth Jennings	10, 19, 61
Notes on Contributors	62

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Editorial

John the Evangelist remarks that no one has ever seen God. He also reports the word of Jesus to Philip that 'anyone who has seen me has seen the Father'. Paul had a striking confrontation with the resurrected Jesus, and so apparently did Peter. In the book of Revelation heavenly beings, events and places are depicted, but always the vision is communicated in language that is metaphorical. Theophanies in the Bible have an aspect of hiddenness, God cannot be readily seen; the reaction is one of fear; they are ephemeral; they accompany or announce a verbal message from God. The witness then must negotiate the difficulties involved in putting it into writing.

Our recent conference addressed this subject, and one or two articles in this issue touch on it. A forthcoming volume of essays, mostly from members, will take the topic still further.

Paul Ricœur reflects in *The Rule of Metaphor* that 'to impute a discourse common to God and to his creatures would be to destroy divine transcendence; on the other hand, assuming total incommunicability of meanings from one level to the other would condemn one to utter agnosticism'.

Our focus tends to be the writer's task and tools, but in the originating Biblical tradition the author and prime mover is not human but divine. The two paradigms need not be opposed. We can see ourselves as like the physicists who represent light using particle theory while recognising that wave theory is also available, also true. Kevin Vanhoozer, in a recent book which is discussed in these pages, proposes what he calls remythologizing. '*Theologeîn* or remythologizing,' he writes, 'has primary reference to how God co-opts human language and concepts, both in short spurts (e.g. metaphors) and longer stretches of discourse (e.g. narrative, apocalyptic).'

Theology comes struggling behind and between the texts. As Austin Farrer wrote (in *Reflective Faith*), theologians 'have strained their minds to grasp the actual relations of likeness in which things stand to God.' Yet for all the difficulties the effort is one we should make, for the name of God has inexhaustible influence, and power that is, to use terms which step out from our present universe, infinite and eternal.

Roger Kojecký

Quiet Fulness: Divine Symbolism in C.S. Lewis's Theory and Practice

Michael Ward

This essay, delivered as a paper at the autumn conference, is derived from my *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

In 1924, a young C.S. Lewis read a book called *Space, Time and Deity* by the philosopher, Samuel Alexander. It was an event which was important enough for him to record in his diary: 'I took Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity* out of the Union and went to Wadham [College] where I sat and walked in the garden reading the introduction, enjoying the beauty of the place, and greatly interested by my author's truthful antithesis of enjoyment and contemplation.'¹ Enjoyment and Contemplation. It's this distinction that I want to focus on in the first part of this essay, because it is fundamental to a proper understanding of Lewis's theory of divine symbolism. Putting God into writing. How do you do it? Do you do it by Contemplation or Enjoyment? Only once we have answered this theoretical question will we turn to see how Lewis tried in practice to put God into his writing (his fictional writing, that is – and in particular his most famous example of fictional writing, the seven Chronicles of Narnia).

First, the theoretical question: what *are* Contemplation and Enjoyment? Lewis writes about these terms in *Surprised by Joy*, where once again he recounts reading Alexander's book and how he immediately accepted the distinction between these two modes of consciousness and ever afterwards regarded it as an 'indispensable tool of thought'.² And he eventually wrote up his own version of Alexander's distinction in a short article called 'Meditation in a Toolshed', in which he recast Contemplation and Enjoyment as follows:

I was standing today in the dark toolshed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood, that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.

Then I moved, so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, ninety-odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.³

'Looking along the beam' is what Alexander had called Enjoyment (participant, inhabited, personal, committed knowledge) and 'looking at the beam' is what he

¹ *All My Road Before Me: The Diary of C.S. Lewis, 1922-1927*, ed. Walter Hooper, HarperCollins, 1991, p. 301.

² *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, Collins, 1982, p. 174.

³ 'Meditation in a Toolshed' in *C.S. Lewis: Essay Collection*, ed. Lesley Walmsley, HarperCollins, 2000, p. 607.

had called Contemplation (abstract, external, impersonal, uninvolved knowledge). For Lewis, this distinction was so fundamental that he was prepared to divide conscious knowledge accordingly: 'Instead of the twofold division into Conscious and Unconscious, we need a three-fold division: the Unconscious, the Enjoyed, and the Contemplated.'¹ Like the ancient Persians who debated everything twice (once when they were sober and once when they were drunk), we should try out every question in both lights, the light of Enjoyment (similar to the French *connaître*) and the light of Contemplation (similar to the French *savoir*).

There is one particular question to which this distinction is especially relevant – the question: 'How do we know God?' Do we know God principally through Contemplation or Enjoyment? And when I say 'we', I mean first of all humanity in general and then secondly Christians in particular.

As regards humanity in general, we have a knowledge of God by virtue of being God's creatures. We have to, because He made us and sustains us. God in Christ represents 'the all-pervasive principle of concretion or cohesion whereby the universe holds together' (Lewis's paraphrase of Colossians 1:17, in *Miracles*²).

But this puts us into something of a predicament: we can't step outside God and look back at Him as if from some completely external spectator's point of view. Lewis wrote about this predicament in *Miracles*:

The fact which is in one respect the most obvious and primary fact, and through which alone you have access to all the other facts, may be precisely the one that is most easily forgotten – forgotten not because it is so remote or abstruse but because it is so near and so obvious. And that is exactly how the Supernatural has been forgotten.³

Miracles uses a variety of images to symbolise this natural human forgetfulness, including transparent windows, native grammar, and breathing. When we see a window-pane, rather than seeing through it, it is probably because it is dirty; when we consciously have to make our verbs agree with our nouns it is because we are speaking a foreign language; and when we become aware of the noise of our breathing it is because of illness or over-exertion. Clean windows, mother tongues, and healthy lungs do not draw attention to themselves: they work best when they are noticed least. As a result we can quite easily overlook them and act as if they were of no importance. Lewis quotes Aristotle to the same effect: 'For as bats' eyes are to daylight so is our intellectual eye to those truths which are, in their own nature, the most obvious of all.'⁴

And it is not just in *Miracles*, but throughout his writings, that Lewis points out this natural human tendency to be oblivious to the obvious. In *Mere Christianity* he writes: 'Since that [divine] power, if it exists, would not be one of the observed facts but a reality which makes them, no mere observation of the facts can find it.'⁵ In what he regarded as his best work, *Till We Have Faces*, he has Orual the heroine complain, 'Nothing that's beautiful hides its face. Nothing that's honest hides its

¹ *Surprised by Joy*, p. 175.

² *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, Collins, 1980, p. 121.

³ *Miracles*, p. 45.

⁴ *Miracles*, p. 43.

⁵ *Mere Christianity*, Collins, 1990, p. 32.

name.¹ Of course, she is utterly mistaken. Kallistos Ware suggests that the *leitmotif* of *Till We Have Faces* 'is the hiddenness of the Divine',² and this judgement may be equally well applied to Lewis's general theological vision: he is continually preoccupied with God's unperceived ubiquity and propinquity.

All humanity is 'in' God in a sense, by virtue of being God's creatures: made and sustained by this divine Word. Christians are 'in' God in a further sense, by obedience, voluntarily, through faith, through reliance on the animating power of the Holy Spirit.

And if it is hard for us as creatures to see the divine nature (because the divine nature is the ground of being, closer to us than we are to ourselves), there is a further difficulty in seeing the divine nature when we are its willing and obedient disciples, for the Holy Spirit and the *novitas* (or new life) that He brings are exceptionally difficult to symbolise. As Lewis wrote:

In one sense there is nothing more in a regenerate man than in an unregenerate man, just as there is nothing more in a man who is walking in the right direction than in one who is walking in the wrong direction. In another sense, however, it might be said that the regenerate man is totally different from the unregenerate, for the regenerate life, the Christ that is formed in him, transforms every part of him: in it his spirit, soul and body will all be reborn.³

Novitas thus means both nothing and everything. How is such a paradoxical situation to be symbolised?

One might answer, in the case of an author such as Lewis, who considered himself 'regenerate', that it could be achieved by examining his own 'new life' and seeing what sorts of symbols it suggests to him. Lewis, however, was extremely wary of anyone who claimed to be able to make the Holy Spirit an object of conscious Contemplation. He suspected that,

save by God's direct miracle, spiritual experience can never abide introspection. If even our emotions will not do so ... much less will the operations of the Holy Ghost. The attempt to discover by introspective analysis our own spiritual condition is to me a horrible thing which reveals, at best, not the secrets of God's spirit and ours, but their transpositions in intellect, emotion and imagination, and which at worst may be the quickest road to presumption or despair.⁴

The impossibility of inspecting one's spiritual life arises from the simple fact that one cannot step outside it, for 'He is above me and within me and below me and all about me';⁵ 'He is inside you as well as outside';⁶ 'He is always both within us and over against us.'⁷ There is an inescapable participatory aspect to the Christian's

¹ *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*, Collins, 1985, p. 168.

² Kallistos Ware, 'God of the Fathers: C. S. Lewis and Eastern Christianity' in David Mills (ed.), *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998, p. 58.

³ *Miracles*, p. 176.

⁴ 'Transposition' in *C.S. Lewis: Essay Collection*, ed. Lesley Walmsley, HarperCollins, 2000, p. 274.

⁵ *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, Collins, 1983, p. 23.

⁶ *Mere Christianity*, p. 129.

⁷ *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm* p. 71.

relationship with God and 'looking along the beam' of that participation means inevitably that the beam is invisible. Lewis applied Alexander's category of Enjoyment to the Christian's experience of the Holy Spirit: 'In the Christian life you are not usually looking *at* Him [the Holy Spirit] . . . you have to think of the third Person as something inside you, or behind you.'¹

The typically insensible nature of the Holy Spirit's operations presumably accounts for why Lewis makes the startling statement that 'there can be no plausible images of . . . the Spirit.'² This is startling because there are certain images of the Third Person of the Trinity which are sanctioned by scripture and tradition, notably *dove*, *breath*, and *fire*. Lewis is naturally aware of these, and uses them himself in various places when wanting to evoke something of the Holy Spirit's presence. But these moments are when Lewis is content, as it were, to atomise the Spirit and symbolise His transpositions into sensible awareness. Properly understood, however, the Spirit is just as present when un-sensed as sensed; and His insensible presence is the more usual experience for the Christian, in Lewis's view. Be that as it may, it is in any case 'the actual presence, not the *sensation* of the presence, of the Holy Ghost which begets Christ in us. The *sense* of the presence is a super-added gift for which we give thanks when it comes, and that's all about it.'³

This picture is further complicated by the fact that the Holy Spirit is not present in the regenerate individual alone; rather 'He speaks also through Scripture, the Church, Christian friends, books etc.'⁴ Because of this, 'we may ignore, but can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere *incognito*.'⁵ Considered on this large scale, how is a writer to symbolise a universal and usually imperceptible spiritual presence? If God is present everywhere *incognito*, how can His presence be brought to cognitive effect without changing its nature? The difficulty of such representation explains Lewis's remark that 'the Holy Ghost is not matter for *epic* poetry.'⁶ In *Paradise Lost*, for example, the absences of the Third Person of the Trinity are not noticed until they are pointed out. In lyric poetry, however, which may try to encapsulate discrete moments of spiritual intensity where Enjoyment is raised (or lowered?) temporarily to Contemplative consciousness, the Spirit may be more easily depicted. But to symbolise Him in 'the big picture' is a much harder task for the poet to accomplish.

In the big picture, *novitas* is not confined to moments of special intensity, but to all moments, special and ordinary, individual and universal: *theosis*, the sharing in the divine life, means sharing them all. This was Lewis's settled view and therefore, although Wesley Kort in *C.S. Lewis, Then and Now* may be right in one sense to say that Lewis's work is 'without strong doctrines of . . . the Holy Spirit'⁷ (for it is true that he writes very little about the Spirit doctrinally in his apologetics), we must not assume that the Spirit's apparent symbolic absence

¹ *Mere Christianity*, p. 149.

² *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, p. 85.

³ Letter to Mary Willis Shelburne, 20 Feb 1955.

⁴ Letter to Genia Goetz, 20 June 1952.

⁵ *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, p. 77.

⁶ *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 87.

⁷ Wesley A. Kort, *C.S. Lewis Then and Now*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 15.

from his work is the same as a real absence or that it betokens a lack of interest in Pneumatology. Lewis had his own very strongly held belief in the difficulty, even the impropriety, of Contemplating one's *novitas*, and an equally strong belief in the presence of the Spirit flooding and transvaluing every part of a Christian's life. In other words, his doctrine of the Holy Spirit was that He could and should be Enjoyed, and as fully as possible. The possibility of full Enjoyment was great because, in his view (which he took from MacDonald), 'that which is best [God] gives most plentifully, as is reason with Him. Hence the quiet fulness of ordinary nature; hence the Spirit to them that ask it.'¹

Correlatively, the major feature of his spirituality is the exercising of Enjoyment consciousness in order to experience that hidden divinity. Coming to know God, for Lewis, is not like 'learning a subject' but like 'breathing a new atmosphere',² and it is of the highest significance that the word 'atmosphere' should also be his preferred term for the main attraction of fairy-tale or romance. And here we come onto the second main part of my argument – Lewis's practice: his practical expression of Enjoyment consciousness through the artistic weaving together of a literary atmosphere in a fairy-tale or romance.

In 1940 he gave an address to the Martlets, the literary society of University College, Oxford, entitled 'The Kappa Element in Romance'. 'Kappa' he took from the initial letter of the Greek word *κρυπτόν*, meaning 'hidden' or 'cryptic'. Lewis later reworked the talk as the essay 'On Stories,' published in 1947, and although he dropped the term 'kappa' from 'On Stories', the hidden thing itself was still his main concern. By this stage in his career he tended to call it by a number of different terms, of which 'atmosphere' is the most common.

'Atmosphere' is a somewhat inadequate word to describe what Lewis was concerned with, but then he once complained how his critical interests had no established terminology. Historical criticism and character criticism had, in his view, by long practice perfected their own terminology, aided by the fact that their concerns were those that people were accustomed to handling in the everyday business of life. 'But the things I want to talk about have no vocabulary and criticism has for centuries kept almost complete silence on them.'³ He mentions certain pioneering studies in the field – Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* and Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* – and also names Wilson Knight and Owen Barfield among those scholars who were attending to the same sort of critical terrain, but he brings no terms out of their works, nor does he forge any permanent terms of his own.

He uses a variety of words in his efforts to catch his meaning. They include: 'the *ipseitas*, the peculiar unity of effect produced by a special balancing and patterning of thoughts and classes of thoughts';⁴ 'a state or quality';⁵ 'flavour

¹ George MacDonald: *An Anthology*, San Francisco, HarperCollins, 2001, p. 128.

² *Reflections on the Psalms*, Collins, 1984, p. 95.

³ 'Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?' in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper, Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 104.

⁴ 'The Empty Universe' in *C.S. Lewis: Essay Collection*, ed. Lesley Walmsley, p. 636.

⁵ 'On Stories' in *C.S. Lewis: Essay Collection*, ed. Lesley Walmsley, p. 503.

or atmosphere';¹ 'smell or taste';² 'mood';³ 'quiddity'.⁴ In a comic poem that he published in the Oxford Magazine in the 1930s he tries to summarise it thus:

Q is for Quality – otherwise 'Whatness' –
The gauntness of Ghent and the totness of Totnes.⁵

Again and again, in defending works of romance, Lewis argues that it is the quality or tone of the whole story that is its main attraction. The invented world of romance is conceived with this kind of qualitative richness because romancers feel the real world itself to be 'cryptic, significant, full of voices and "the mystery of life"'.⁶ Lovers of romances go back and back to such stories in the same way that we go 'back to a fruit for its taste; to an air for ... what? for *itself*; to a region for its whole atmosphere – to Donegal for its Donegality and London for its Londonness. It is notoriously difficult to put these tastes into words.'⁷

That this atmospheric quality is virtually inexpressible leads Lewis to speak of it at times as a spiritual thing. For instance, it is 'the vast, empty vision'⁸ of *Hamlet* that is, in his view, Shakespeare's chief accomplishment – the sense that 'a certain spiritual region'⁹ has somehow been captured by the use of images such as night, ghosts, a sea cliff, a graveyard, and a pale man in black clothes. Within the mesh of these images the mysterious epiphenomenal flavour of *Hamlet* is caught and communicated to the attentive reader or theatre-goer. Likewise, in David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus*, the planet Tormance is so described that it amounts to an encapsulation of 'a region of the spirit'.¹⁰ The net of the story – the events, the characters, the background descriptions – has temporarily ensnared, as if it were an elusive bird, a sheer state of being; and for the duration of the read, this bird's plumage may be 'enjoyed'.¹¹

'Enjoyed' – the Alexander term again. The inner atmosphere of a fairy-tale or romance is to be Enjoyed, not Contemplated, just as God's Spirit is to be (and indeed has to be) Enjoyed, not Contemplated. Here we turn to see how Lewis's theory about divine portrayals informed his practice as a writer of fiction, for when he came to write his own fairy-tales, the seven Chronicles of Narnia, these two interests in Enjoyment (the theological interest and the literary interest) came together, I believe, and he carefully constructed each Narnia Chronicle so that the atmosphere of each story was intimately bound up with the portrayal of Aslan and the spirit that he imparts to the children in each tale.

Lewis achieved this, I believe (or at any rate, attempted to achieve it) by using the imagery of the seven heavens, the seven planets of the pre-Copernican cosmos, which he was familiar with as a concomitant of his expertise in medieval

¹ 'Christianity and Literature' in *C.S. Lewis: Essay Collection*, ed. Lesley Walmsley, p. 415.

² 'Sir Walter Scott' in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper, p. 212.

³ *Spenser's Images of Life*, ed. Alastair Fowler, Cambridge University Press, 1967, p. 116.

⁴ *Surprised by Joy*, pp. 160, 168.

⁵ 'Abecedarium Philosophicum', *The Oxford Magazine*, LII (30/11/33) p. 298.

⁶ 'The Anthropological Approach' in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper, p. 310.

⁷ *Spenser's Images of Life*, ed. Alastair Fowler, p. 115; Lewis's ellipsis.

⁸ 'Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?' in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper p. 102.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁰ 'On Stories' in *C.S. Lewis: Essay Collection*, ed. Lesley Walmsley, p. 498.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

literature – for of course the old sevenfold image of the cosmos is used pervasively in medieval texts, most famously in the *Paradiso* (which Lewis, incidentally, regarded as the ‘highest point that poetry had ever reached’).¹ Lewis described the seven heavens as ‘spiritual symbols’ of ‘permanent value’² and it was out of these seven spiritual symbols (the Sun, the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn) that he constructed each of the seven Narnian stories.

‘Quiet fulness’ is a good description of the presence of the planets in the Narnia Chronicles. Lewis employs planetary imagery so that each Chronicle is quietly full with it. The imagery is ‘quiet’ in the sense that it draws no attention to itself: it is not something one looks at as one reads each tale, but something one looks along. And the imagery is ‘full’ in the sense that it determines the general shape and feel of each story, governing the architectonics of each narrative, the incidental ornamentation, and also, most significantly, the portrayal of the Christ-like character of Aslan and the Spirit that he imparts to the faithful characters in each story.

So, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the boys and girls become kings and queens in a story structured out of the symbolism of kingly Jupiter; in *Prince Caspian* they harden into chivalrous knights, and romp in Bacchanalian revelry with Mars, the god of war and the god of vegetation (the latter his capacity as Mars Silvanus, to whom the month of March is sacred); in *The Voyage of the ‘Dawn Treader’*, they drink light, acquire a right attitude to gold, and tread the dawn in a story irradiated by the imagery of Sol. And so on.

By means of Enjoyment consciousness, getting his readers to inhabit, not just Contemplate, a Christ-saturated world, Lewis presented what he believed to be our situation vis-à-vis God. We can ‘look at’ Christ, but we will only perceive him truly if we do so by ‘looking along’ the Holy Spirit. The characters in each book can look at Aslan, but they will only see him in the deepest sense when they breathe his atmosphere, in other words, when they rely on the Spirit he spreads abroad in each tale, that Spirit (jovial, martial, solar, *et cetera*) with which each story is quietly full.

¹ ‘Shelley, Dryden, and Mr Eliot’ in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper, Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 203.

² ‘The Alliterative Metre’, *ibid.*, p. 24.

Scholar's Melancholy

The mind too has her fossils to record her past,
Cold characters, immobile, of what once was new
And hot with life. Old papers, as we rummage through
Neglected drawers, still show us where the pen, fast, fast,
Ate up the sheets: and wondering, we remember vast
Designs and knowledge gathered, and intent to do
What we were able then to have done ... something drew
A sponge across that slate. The ferly would not last.

Though Will can stretch his viaduct with level thrust
High above shagg'd woods, quaking swamp, and desert dust
Of changing times, yet he must dig for his material
In local quarries of the varying moment – must
Use wattle and daub in countries without stone, and trust
To basest matter the proud arches' form imperial.

On a Theme from Nicolas of Cusa

(De Docta Ignorantia, III.ix.)

When body and soul feed, one sees
Their differing physiologies.
Firmness of apple, fluted shape
Of celery, or tight-skinned grape
I grind and mangle when I eat,
Then in dark, salt, internal heat,
Annihilate their natures by
The very act that makes them I.

But when the soul partakes of good
Or truth, which are her savoury food,
By some far subtler chemistry
It is not they that change, but she,
Who feels them enter with the state
Of conquerors her opened gate,
Or, mirror-like, digests their ray
By turning luminous as they.

C. S. Lewis

Unveiled Faces: God and Self in C.S. Lewis

Sharon Jebb

T*ill We Have Faces* is a novel about the self. In Orual, the narrator, we have a profound portrayal of a person who diminishes herself by her behaviour and choices, a woman who retreats behind a veil of self-deception until she is diminished in her self-perception to a mere body, 'this lean carrion' to which she refers in the novel's opening paragraph.¹ But the text also points us in the opposite direction, towards 'fullness of being', through the changes wrought in Orual herself, and through her sister Psyche, whom Lewis referred to as an *anima naturaliter Christiana*, or natural Christian soul. This piece, then, is an exploration of personhood, as conveyed by *Till We Have Faces*, but with occasional supporting reference to other texts by Lewis.²

An initial short summary of the novel (which was based on the myth of Cupid and Psyche) may be helpful. Orual is Queen of the land of Glome, a pagan culture parallel in time to the Greek empire. The book starts out as an accusation of the gods, whom she believes have treated her unjustly. Her sister, Psyche, is a beautiful young woman who is much drawn to the life of the gods. Through a sacrificial gesture, she ends up as the bride of the god of the Grey Mountain, son of Ungit, the primary goddess. Orual's possessiveness and jealousy lead to her betrayal of Psyche and set her on a path of self-deception lasting many years. She takes to wearing a veil in her new role as Queen of Glome. The veil is, she claims, convenient because it hides her unattractive features from her subjects, but the reader is aware that in veiling herself, she is choosing to hide from the consequences of her actions, from the gods, and ultimately from herself. After working tirelessly for her country, day after day, for forty years, she hears the story of Psyche and herself in a way that jolts her, not to an honest recognition of her jealousy, but to anger at the gods. It prompts her to pick up her pen and write an account and an accusation of them.

In the second part of the book, it becomes clear that the writing has changed Orual profoundly. She moves to a more honest perspective as a consequence of having put things into words, sifting through the truths that she has long been denying. Other means force her to face the truth too; words spoken by others about how she has used those around her, especially her faithful Greek tutor, the Fox, and Bardia, her faithful friend and servant. Visions and dreams force her to descend deep inside herself and to recognize what she has become. In her despair, she tries to kill herself, but the god intervenes, and she is left, broken and alone, to try to understand who she is. Ultimately, she hears herself, standing unveiled before the gods, defending what she has done, babbling, until eventually she is

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* [1956], Fount Paperbacks, 1998, p. 3.

² I concur with Paul Vitz that it is possible to use the terms 'self', 'person' and 'identity' interchangeably, whilst acknowledging that person includes the totality of body, mind and spirit, where self does not include spirit. Identity is a component of the self. Paul Vitz, 'From the Modern and Postmodern Selves to the Transmodern Self', in *The Self: Beyond the Postmodern Crisis*, Paul C. Vitz & Susan M. Felch, Delaware, ISI Books, 2006, XI.

silenced. At last, through a rather complex series of events, she comes to a point of truth, a realization of what really happened, and how she has been running from the truth for forty years; not just the truth about what she did, but the truth of the real nature of the gods. By the end of the book, standing once again before the gods, without veil and without deception, she is able to understand why the gods have treated her as they have. In the end, she too, like Psyche, has a beauty and fullness of soul which can only come from intimacy with the divine.

The Diminished Self

But the journey is a particularly long and tortuous one. Orual starts by negating herself immediately after her second visit to Psyche, who is living with her husband, the god of the grey mountain. On her return she avoids telling the Fox the truth: that it was her own possessive and deceptive behaviour which resulted in Psyche's being alienated from her husband. More than that, her denial that she has seen the god's palace, (sight of which was a 'ferly', a 'wonder' in Old Scots) becomes incorporated into her own outlook, and leads her down a path of self-deception. From this point of double deception, she becomes trapped in a life of functional detachment, burying herself in her work, building up her kingdom, refusing to spare herself, or others. It is a kind of Stoicism, with her carefully controlled emotions and emphasis upon the rational and material, an autonomous way of living learnt in part from the Fox, but stemming primarily from her desire to avoid thinking about Psyche and the concomitant implications.

There are a number of specific attitudes which contribute to the process of self-negation. Orual's first error is the way in which she wants to possess Psyche. Her sin is *cupiditas*, or possessive loving. 'She was mine' is her refrain. She cannot bear that Psyche cannot be hers and so she interferes, destroying her happiness. This is a pattern she repeats with others, the Fox and Bardia most notably. In the end she is a devourer, 'the swollen spider, squat at its centre, gorged with men's stolen lives' (p. 209). Lewis's language insists on the cannibalistic dimension to this behaviour.

But Orual wants to possess not only others – but herself first. As she says to the judge, 'We want to be our own. I was my own and Psyche was mine and no-one else had any right to her' (p. 221). For Lewis, lost souls are characterised by a 'rejection of everything that is not simply themselves'. In writing of Adam and Eve as 'our first parents' who also fell into sin, Lewis says: 'They wanted, as we say, to "call their souls their own". But that means to live a lie, for our souls are not, in fact, our own.'¹ In *Surprised by Joy* he cites George MacDonald, 'The one principle of Hell is – "I am my own".'² And in *The Screwtape Letters* he speaks of 'the ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration upon self which is the mark of Hell'.³ Orual wished to 'call her soul her own', but in attempting to do so, she damaged others and herself, for her soul was not, in fact, her own. The sheer interconnectedness of her soul with the souls of others is made clear to her, in particular through the words of Ansit, Bardia's wife.

Orual is also self-limited by her attitude towards the divine. Influenced by the Fox's material Stoicism, and by her own 'rejection of all that is not herself',

¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* [1940], Fount Paperbacks, 1977, pp. 63-4.

² Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, Fount Paperbacks, 1955, p. 165.

³ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* [1942], Fount Paperbacks, 1955, p. ix.

she banishes the thought of the god of the Grey Mountain's palace as a figment of her imagination. She rationalises it away, so that the riddle set by the gods is no longer a riddle (and a means of learning, as the Greek gods intended), but a situation which has a pragmatic and apparently 'prudent' solution; it is not a god who has taken Psyche, but a thief who is happy to take advantage of her fantastical imagination about the gods. All ideas about the gods are 'lies of priests and poets'. Lewis was greatly influenced by a pre-Enlightenment way of thinking about reason or *ratio*, whereby it was much less a way of making deductions, and much more a kind of insightful recognition, called *intellectus*.¹ Orual proceeds by using a distorted *ratio*, which is inadequate even when truthfully used. In Glome, we are told, 'holy wisdom is not clear and thin like water, but thick and dark like blood' (p. 38). In the end, Orual is diminished by the thinness of her rationality, and by the dishonesty which lies behind the use of it.

Ultimately, Orual trusts to her own reason and desires. She trusts no one, especially not Psyche, although Psyche has never told her a lie. Her lack of trust extends to the gods as well; she refuses Psyche's offer that the god will help her to see. 'I don't want it! I don't want it. I hate it. Hate it, hate it, hate it. Do you understand?' Her refusal to trust anyone, even the gods, is made clear by the symbolism of the veil.

The significance of the veil is profound. When Orual puts it on, it is not merely to hide her physical features, it is clearly tied in with her deceptiveness. She deceives the Fox, and she tries to deceive herself; after that people are of little importance to her. Her facelessness, then, is acquired because she no longer has any way of engaging truly with others, nor with the divine. These all erode Orual's personhood, leaving her the diminished, bitter, resentful and self-absorbed person who takes up her pen to write her complaint to the gods.

The high rank of persons

If Orual serves as an image of diminished personhood, the final pages of the novel give a glimpse of a profoundly changed Orual, one who is stripped of her old rags, even the veil that has given her protection for so long, and forced her to hear her own voice and see the truth of her past behaviour towards Psyche.

But as the loss of self was a process, so the recovery of self is also a process; one which is explored in Part 2 of *Till We Have Faces*. Having been made to recognise the extent to which she has gorged herself on Bardia, Orual is next forced – in a vision – to dig 'far below any dens that foxes can dig'. It is hard work, through raw earth, clinging clay and living rock. Finally, she comes to what she has dreaded – the mirror. In the mirror, Orual realises that it is her soul that is ugly. It is a point of crisis for Orual. She has come face to face with the truth – a truth which has lain deeply buried – and from that point she chooses to go unveiled. This is the true turning point in the novel, the moment of repentance, of *metanoia*, although the process continues as Orual learns to reveal her buried self, one which involves 'dragging up terrors, humiliations, struggles, and anguish that I had not thought

¹ As he explained in *The Discarded Image* [1964], 'We are enjoying intellectus when we "just see" a self-evident truth; we are exercising ratio when we proceed step by step to prove a truth which is not self-evident. A cognitive life in which all truth can be simply "seen" would be the life of an intelligentia, an angel', *The Discarded Image*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 157.

of for years, letting Orual awake and speak, digging her almost out of a grave, out of the walled well' (p. 186).

Lewis himself explained this in a letter to a correspondent, in connection with *Till We Have Faces*. 'The idea was that a human being must become real ... must be speaking with its own voice (not one of its borrowed voices), expressing its actual desires (not what it imagines it desires), being for good or ill itself, not any mask, veil or *persona*.'¹ But for Lewis, if one is to be a person, it is not just other humans that one needs to unveil before. It is the divine as well; one needs to address God with one's 'own voice', expressing actual desires, not just imagined ones, speaking that which lies at 'the centre of our souls'. Only this level of honesty can actually call forth a response from the divine. As Lewis put it in *Letters to Malcolm* – when we assent with our will to be known by God, we have unveiled; 'Instead of merely being known, we show, we tell, we offer ourselves to view ... By unveiling ... we assume the high rank of persons before Him. And He, descending, becomes a Person to us.'² Here we assent to be known – and here we know. 'God is in some measure to a man as that man is to God.'³ Assuming 'the high rank of persons' involves an active engagement with the divine. It is not a passive state but one that requires active engagement, showing, telling, offering ourselves to the sight of God. By extension, then, unveiling requires faith. Such unveiling assumes that God is to be trusted. If distrust has walled in Orual, it is faith that will free her. By the end, Orual is able to hear the truth about herself and accept it without twisting it to her own ends; she recognises the truth and accepts the consequences. But in order to do so, she has had to submit to the Divine Nature, 'which wounds and perhaps destroys us merely by being what it is' (p. 215). She has to die before she dies, as the god warns her. There will be no chance afterwards. It is a long and bewildering process which culminates in the trial, where she is stripped of her veil and stands naked before the judge, babbling self-righteously, until she comes to a full and final recognition of her own self-enclosure and stagnation (p. 216).

In contrast, Psyche is a portrayal of a self-transcending love that overcomes the boundaries of self, and in relatedness, leads towards true communion. Psyche is the natural Christian soul who is always transparent, the one who sacrifices herself for the people of Glome, without dishonest motivation or false desire. Yet, at the conclusion of the novel, Orual is Psyche; she too has become a Christian soul; 'You also are Psyche', the god tells her (p. 233). As the Fox puts it, 'We're all limbs and part of one Whole. Hence, of each other. Men, and gods, flow in and

¹ Letter to Dorothea Conybeare, in *Letters to a Sister from Rose Macaulay*, ed. Constance Babington Smith, Collins, 1964, p. 261.

² Lewis, *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm* [1964], Fount Paperbacks, 1998, pp. 18-19. It may be worth noting that Lewis was aware of the inadequacy of the image. 'This talk of "meeting" is, no doubt, anthropomorphic; as if God and I could be face to face, like two fellow-creatures, when in reality He is above me and within me and below me and all about me. That is why it must be balanced by all manner of metaphysical and theological abstractions. But never, here or anywhere else, let us think that while anthropomorphic images are a concession to our weakness, the abstractions are the literal truth. Both are equally concessions; each singly misleading, and the two together mutually corrective. Unless you sit to it very lightly, continually murmuring "Not thus, not thus, neither is this Thou", the abstraction is fatal. It will make the life of lives inanimate and the love of loves impersonal.'

³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

out and mingle' (p.228). Here we find Charles Williams' doctrines of co-inherence and exchange which Lewis had come to accept. In *Arthurian Torso* Lewis wrote; 'We can and should "bear one another's burdens" in a sense much more nearly literal than is usually dreamed of. Any two souls can ("under the Omnipotence") make an agreement to do so: the one can offer to take another's shame or anxiety or grief and the burden will actually be transferred.'¹ Transference does not just occur between humans. So too with co-inherence. Lewis himself never used the word, but the principle glimmers through his writings. Only in this way can the 'mingling' of the characters in *Till We Have Faces* be understood. Here we begin to glimpse the profound sense of connectedness, the mingling of 'men and gods', the way in which all is a part of the whole. Nothing can be isolated; all is connected at root.

God as the Ground of Reality

Lewis's vision of personhood is one which goes profoundly beyond the thin Greek rationalism of the Fox. Rather, God is the ground and continual supply of reality for a person: a view which results in a concept of personhood that is radically dynamic. For Lewis, people are not merely natural beings. A human, he said, can become a supernatural being by being 'born again; that is, if it surrenders itself back to God in Christ, it will then have a life which is absolutely supernatural, which is not created at all but begotten, for the creature is then sharing the begotten life of the Second Person of the Trinity.'²

In a real sense the triune life is drawn into the earthly substance. Or vice versa. The term Lewis used was Transposition, as he explained in an essay of the same name:

You can put it whichever way you please. You can say that by Transposition our humanity, senses and all, can be made the vehicle of beatitude. Or you can say that the heavenly bounties by Transposition are embodied during this life in our temporal experience. But the second way is better.... If flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom, that is not because they are too solid, too gross, too distinct, too 'illustrious with being'. They are too flimsy, too transitory, too phantasmal.³

This transvaluation of the material world was for him, suggestive of the Incarnation. With reference to the credal idea that the Incarnation worked 'not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God', he suggested that manhood *could* be drawn into Deity.⁴ He wrote, 'and it seems to me that there is a real analogy between this and what I have called Transposition: that humanity, still remaining itself, is not merely counted as, but veritably drawn into, Deity.'⁵

However, whilst Lewis was clearly determined to give humans a glimpse of

¹ *Arthurian Torso: Containing the Posthumous Fragment of "The Figure of Arthur" by Charles Williams and a Commentary on the Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams by C. S. Lewis*, Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 123.

² Lewis, *Miracles* [1942], Fount Paperbacks, 1998, p. 180.

³ Lewis, 'Transposition', *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* [1965], New York, Touchstone, 1996, p. 86.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

their divine potential, he stopped short of equating humans with God. In *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, he wrote:

All creatures, from the angel to the atom, are other than God; with an otherness to which there is no parallel: incommensurable. The very word 'to be' cannot be applied to Him and to them in exactly the same sense. But also, no creature is other than He in the same way in which it is other than all the rest. He is in it as they can never be in each other. In each of them he is the ground and continual supply of its reality.¹

And he continues, 'Therefore of each creature we can say, 'This also is Thou: neither is this Thou.' In this way, God's nearness *and* his otherness were emphatically affirmed. For God is not *parallel* to us, Lewis says. He undergirds us:

But he is the ground of our being. He is always both within us and over against us. Our reality is so much from His reality as He, moment by moment, projects into us. The deeper the level within ourselves from which our prayer, or any other act, wells up, the more it is His, but not at all the less ours. Rather, most ours, when most His.... To be discontinuous from God as I am discontinuous from you would be annihilation.²

It is from this that our desire springs, as he wrote in 'The Weight of Glory':

Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache.³

Again and again he stressed the continuity of the natural and the spiritual. In *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis seems to be coming close to articulating a full doctrine of divinization or deification – the *theosis* of the Greek fathers. Stressing that humans are partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), the Fathers emphasised that humans share in the transforming life and glory of God. 'Christ became man that we might be God', declared Athanasius in *The Incarnation of the Word of God*.⁴ (It is worth noting that Lewis was reading Athanasius at around the same time as he was putting together the broadcast talks that became *Mere Christianity* in the early 40's.⁵) Kallistos Ware states that in *theosis*, humans participate in the energies

¹ *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, p. 70.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67. We cannot know what source may have lent itself to Lewis's use of the vocabulary of 'grounding'. It is possible that it was his reading of Jacob Boehme in 1930 which led to his adoption of 'ground', as an anglicisation of Boehme's *ungrund*, *unground* or *primordial Abyss*, (and reminiscent of Alois Haas's *Ursprung*). But a more immediate link – and these were the ones which often seem to have had most impact on Lewis – may have been the thought of Austin Farrer, who became a close friend in the 1950's.

³ Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory', *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, p. 36.

⁴ Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, 4, 20. trans. R. W. Thompson, Oxford Early Christian Texts, 1971.

⁵ Lewis wrote the Introduction to Athanasius' *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, translated by Sister Penelope (Geoffrey Bles, 1944). Sister Penelope's version, however, does not emphasise human deification.

of God, but not his essence. He says, 'Although "oned" with the divine, man still remains man; he is not swallowed up or annihilated, but between him and God there continues always to exist an "I – Thou" relationship of person to person.'¹ Humans always remain creaturely in contrast with God's uncreated status. The initiative in *theosis* lies with God; humans become by grace what God is by nature. But *theosis* is the process whereby humans become what God intended them to be.²

Lewis was aware of the controversial nature of such theological musings. In a letter written in 1959, Lewis comments 'it is certainly scriptural to say that "to as many as believed He gave power to become the sons of God" and the statement "God became man that men might become gods" is Patristic.'³ Nonetheless, it is interesting that Lewis chooses to focus on the term 'god', rather than on sonship, and the weight which he puts onto the term 'gods' is very close to, if not the same as, the concept of *theosis*. For example, in *Mere Christianity* Lewis expresses confidence in the idea that humans could become 'gods':

(God) said (in the Bible) that we were 'gods' and He is going to make good his words. If we let Him – for we can prevent Him, if we choose – He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine....⁴

In 'The Weight of Glory' he writes more of this hidden potential:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would strongly be tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.... There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.⁵

It may be that Lewis had in mind the Greek word for fullness, *plerōma* (rather than the Gnostic sense of the dwelling place of the spirit), in much the same way that Paul used the word in Ephesians, when he prayed that the church in Ephesus may be 'filled to the measure of all the fullness of God'.⁶

Lewis had tried to show this *plerōma* or fullness in previous novels, not least the Green Lady in *Perelandra*, and Ransom in *That Hideous Strength*. But Psyche vividly reflects the love, abundance and receptivity of the divine image. During her life, the people of Glome perceive Psyche as a goddess, and even the rational Fox says of her, 'Terribly does she resemble an undying spirit' (pp. 25-6). However, it is ultimately *after* her death, that Psyche is more real than when she was alive; a thousand times more her very self than she had been before the offering. So much

¹ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, New York, St Vladimir's Press, 1990, p. 28.

² This resonates somewhat with the emphasis of Lewis, as Kallistos Ware testifies. See Kallistos Ware, 'God of the Fathers: C. S. Lewis and Eastern Christianity', *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills, Grand Rapids, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1998, pp. 53-69.

³ Letter to Clyde S. Kilby, 20 January 1959, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, Volume III, ed. Walter Hooper, Harper San Francisco, 2007, pp. 1013-4.

⁴ Lewis, *Mere Christianity* [1952], New York, MacMillan, 1952, p. 206.

⁵ Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory', *The Weight of Glory and other Addresses*, p. 39.

⁶ Ephesians 3:19.

so that Orual declares, 'Goddess? I had never seen a real woman before' (pp. 25-6). Here humanity reaches its greatest fulfilment in divine fullness. The two are inseparable. Lewis is emphatic in this respect. 'To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being in earth.'¹

The ending of *Till We Have Faces* remains only suggestive of exact eschatological detail, but it is adamant about the continuity between this life and the next, and about the mingling of the spiritual and the natural. Just as the human element will continue in some way to be present in the eschaton, so too the spiritual element is present in our earthly existence. As Lewis wrote in *The Four Loves*: 'When we see the face of God we shall know that we have always known it. He has been a party to, has made, sustained and moved moment by moment within, all our earthly experiences of innocent love.'² It could be argued that seeing the face of God is an image which sits somewhat at odds with Lewis's emphasis upon God as the ground of our being. Certainly Lewis's friend Austin Farrer had opted to emphasise God as underlying cause, rather than the 'face-to-face' image used by the Personalists.³ But the two only conflict when viewed from a rather literal level, exactly the level which Lewis has been working so hard to overcome in the novel. In the end, what Lewis is trying to convey goes far beyond the verbal imagery. As Orual recognises at the end of the novel, such images are 'only words, words'; and they should be met, as other religious and theological language should be met, 'with a certain good will, a certain readiness to find meaning.'⁴

Finally, intentional engagement with the divine is vital to this spiritual element in our lives. This was a belief which Lewis incarnated in all his fiction: the *Cosmic Trilogy*, *The Great Divorce*, the *Narnia* series and *Till We Have Faces*. In Orual we see the diminishment of a person who refuses to engage. The aptly named Withers in *That Hideous Strength* becomes increasingly detached in the spirit from the senses and from reason, because he has withdrawn most of his consciousness from the task of living, Lewis tells us. In contrast, the fullest engagement of consciousness is the result of fullest engagement with God: 'Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away and we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit' (2 Corinthians 3:16-18). It is this vision of personhood that Lewis continually tried to convey, nowhere more starkly than in *Till We Have Faces*.

¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 100.

² Lewis, *The Four Loves*, Geoffrey Bles, 1960, p. 158.

³ Austin Farrer, *The Glass of Vision*, Westminster, Dacre Press, 1948, pp. 7-9.

⁴ Lewis, *Christian Reflections* [1967], Fount Paperbacks, 1998, p. 180.

For Us All

It is the spring of the year and a cold morning.
It is a late spring too, and nothing wakes
Save the first primrose, hugging the moss she was born in,
And the pink-studded branch that the wind shakes,
Wafting the delicate colour down in flakes.

It is the spring of our time, the time for dying,
If hope is too heavy to lift and you cannot find
Strength to endure the east, see the petal flying,
To weather the last weeks and the most unkind
Of the whole winter, living upon the mind.

Side by side with the old joy and the old sorrow
We bear the unheard-of hope and the new pain.
Like winter wheat under the iron harrow
We grasp the soil and await the April rain;
Toil and endurance shall earn the harvest again.

On an Old Poem

Like the small soft unchanging flower
The words in silence speak;
Obedient to their ancient power
The tear stands on my cheek.

Though our world burn, the small dim words
Stand here in steadfast grace,
And sing, like the indifferent birds
About a ruined place.

Though the tower fall, the day be done,
The night be drawing near,
Yet still the tearless tune pipes on,
And still evokes the tear:

The tearless tune, wiser than we,
As weak and strong as grass,
Or the wild bracken-fern we see
Spring where the palace was.

Ruth Pitter

The friendly correspondence between C.S. Lewis and Ruth Pitter (d. 1992) testifies to Lewis's admiration of her poems. Influenced by his writings and broadcast talks during World War II, she joined the Anglican Church. She was also a friend of George Orwell, A.R. Orage, Hillaire Belloc and David Cecil. There is a critical biography by Don W. King (2008).

Hosea and the Disintegration of Narrative

Cedric Porter

Amid the proliferation of theologies which has become fashionable at the start of the twenty-first century, in apparent defiance of C.S. Lewis's warning about the need for 'mere Christianity', it is arguable that the most fruitful has proved to be narrative theology. Certainly, in the field of pastoral ministry, it is now commonplace to hear clerics exhorting the traumatised to 'tell their story.' But in the seminal Old Testament prophetic book of Hosea, it is by literally overwhelming the opening expectations of narrative that God is put into writing.

If the New Testament admonition against being unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14) is anything to go by, Hosea receives the word of God by obeying God in performing actions which threaten to violate the integrity of his most cherished instincts as a faithful believer (Hosea 1:2). Although the description of the wife he is commanded to marry seems to mean not actually a professional prostitute but a woman who has whole-heartedly bought into the materialism of Hosea's never-had-it-so-good society, and who may have acted the role of a prostitute as part of the temple fertility rites which are the structural and spiritual heart of that culture, she clearly represents the antithesis of all Hosea stands for as a God-fearing person. And the names Hosea is told to give his children similarly signify a public repudiation of precisely those familial and family values he would be expected to uphold.

Such radical rupturing of assumptions has all the makings of a story, and the rationale for Hosea's behaviour is presented to him as being to enact the Israelite northern kingdom's departure from the way of salvation embedded in its history of deliverance from Egypt, and to follow through the implications and consequences of that dissociation. Yet it is this very consequence, this ineluctable narrational logic, which is immediately called into question as the ground shifts between the prognosis of catastrophic judgement and extravagant oracles of promise. (The latter have embarrassed many commentators – concerned for textual coherence – inclining them to abstract them from reference to ongoing history and ring-fence them as eschatological.)

Hosea is only enabled to speak his prophetic word into the situation of Israel's impending collapse and its realisation, through the emotional re-education of his marriage, whose story is left hanging. His book embarks on a radical defamiliarisation of the God whom his nation's movers and shakers so glibly believe they have co-opted, dismantling predictable progression by dismembering stock phraseology and concepts, riveting attention by instaurating the seismic urgency of extreme compression and elision, switch-backing between person, tense, number and gender to demonstrate the co-inhering issues of divine and human identity, and rendering prose and poetry inextricable, as well as by reversing natural sequence.

If it is characteristically the youngest or younger child of the Hebrew patriarchs in the Old Testament who defies custom and probability to become the bearer of the divine promise, the birth of Hosea's third and apparently final

child becomes the occasion for God to use the 'I AM' first person form of the usual third person name Yahweh, the form associated with the giving of the covenant (Exodus 3:14) and thus the revelation of Israelite national and individual identity, that vital relationship which is here abrogated (Hosea 1:9). This is immediately followed by the first of Hosea's disorienting U-turns as he proclaims: 'In the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," they will be called "sons of the living God"' (Hosea 1:10 *New International Version*.) This looks forward to Chapter 11's description of Israel as God's adopted son, a hidden shape which emerges in the book extrapolating from the virtual chiasmus of 1:2-2:1 itself. This is a key literary device for Hosea, enacting as it does the turnaround of conversion and the way that conversion comes to be seen unconsciously to take shape from what happens in God's own heart – heart that is in the more expansive Hebraic sense the motivating core of being.

The opening of Hosea leads us to expect narrative continuity in what follows, but what gives the book structure is primarily the role played by the imagery. As H. W. Woolf in his commentary points out, this relatively slender prophetic collection uses more similes than any other Old Testament book,¹ yet Hosea's prophetic experience is marked by a profound visual agnosticism. For him the visionary element is invested in the language because his prophetic witness is emerging in a landscape which has become in a sense over-visualised, in which the visual has been commandeered by the flashy ostentation of the Baal cult, and the material expropriated for materialism with the liturgical core of sacrifice comfortably demarcated from anything involving self-sacrifice.

To address this situation, shock tactics are needed – both the defamiliarisation of sacred images which have become idolatrous vehicles of self-righteousness, and turning the enemy's weapons by demythologising what the fertility cult has arrogated for itself so as to demonstrate that creativity comes from God alone – in other words Hosea is involved in the reconfiguration of power as love.

Instead of a Promised Land whose place names evoke cherished intimations of spiritual prestige, Hosea lays bare what James L. Mays in his commentary calls a 'geography of treachery,'² particularly in 6:7-7:2 where it is 'bands of priests' (7:9) who are ringleaders in the pervasive violence.

For Hosea, it is not the supposed 'holy' places but the least likely which are named as the locus for spiritual transformation. This is adumbrated in the way the town and valley of Jezreel is first mentioned (1:4) as being where Jehu slaughtered the royal family wholesale, implying a similar fate for the present ruling clique. But this grim exposition of the meaning of the name Jezreel as 'God sows' is almost immediately contradicted by a more straightforward interpretation which names the site as a focus for the land again being sown with God's people (1:11). And a similar transformation is personalised with regard to Hosea's wife, for whom deprivation is followed by God's promise to 'make the Valley of Achor a door of hope' (2:15) – the very site whose name recalls the fatal consequences of materialism because of Achan's covetousness, will be eloquent of her transformation. Andersen and Freedman point out³ that the puzzling word translated as 'door' is used in Joshua 2: 18, 21 to mean the 'cord' of scarlet which

¹ Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea*, Hermeneia, Fortress Press, [1965], 1974, p. xxiv.

² James L. Mays, *Hosea*, SCM, [1969], 1975, p. 99.

³ Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea*, The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 1980, p. 276.

the prostitute Rahab attaches to the window of her house, and which becomes the means and evidence of her physical and spiritual salvation. (The notoriously disputed status of the Hosean text, with its high proportion of words of uncertain meaning and long history of dubious emendations, is partly a tribute to the way Hosea stretches language.)

Above all, it is the hostile environment of the desert, the scene of Israelite deprivation and penitential wandering, which provides the occasion for new growth that the fake ebullience of Baal worship fails to provide.

The reversal of expectation becomes a structuring principle. As early as 2:14 the question-begging 'therefore' describing God's decision to respond with love to Gomer's forgetting of him, attunes the reader to what in human terms is the equally illogical climactic act of divine grace not to 'carry out my fierce anger' (11:9). And in the announcement at 11:8 that 'My heart is changed within me,' the verb is that used of the 'overthrow' of the recently mentioned Cities of the Plain. (Typically Hosea speaks of the lesser-known Admah and Zeboiim being given over to destruction to avoid any stock response to the perhaps over-familiar Sodom and Gomorrah.) Hosea also upfronts the ambiguity of 'return' – the reversal of the Exodus in the curse 'They will return to Egypt' (8:13) is eventually followed by the closing exhortation to repent: 'Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God' (14:1).

Having warned 'I will break Israel's bow' (1:5), God promises that, as a sign of peace and plenty, 'Bow and sword and battle I will abolish' (2:18). This opening inclusion looks forward to the way Hosea's prophecy closes with a vision of restorative fertility, where the image of Israel flourishing like the proverbial abundance of Lebanon, is followed by the startling picturing of God as a prime object of the Canaanite fertility cult – an association unique in the Old Testament: 'I will answer him and care for him. I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me' (14:8).

In what is a virtually unprecedented move, in ancient Near East terms, the children of the prophet's marriage take over from their father the responsibility for both rebuking Gomer and pleading with her for a change of heart. This follows the anticipated reversal of their negative names and anticipates God speaking of his adopted 'son' in Chapter 11. While it is through the daughter that the central Hosean theme of love is introduced when the meaning of her name 'Not Loved' is reversed.

The reversal of natural sequence also provides a microcosm of Hosea's dislocation of narrative. The recapitulation of the Exodus and what follows at 2:14-15 upsets the chronology by mentioning Achor before Egypt. And the spiritual barrenness of his country is graphically portrayed as their 'glory will fly away like a bird – no birth, no pregnancy, no conception' (9:11). While God promises a wilderness experience (12:9) this is followed by the recollection of 'a prophet' (12:13) being used to take his chosen people out of Egypt.

The reader is continually having to work out who is speaking and sometimes being obliged to make that decision without conclusive evidence. Singular and plural, direct and indirect speech seem to be in continual flux while the referent remains unchanged. When God speaks at 2:16-17 the tones of individual direct address and communal covenantal announcement are merged, like a Cubist painting presenting different viewpoints simultaneously. In the transition from second to first person: 'you will no longer call me "my master (Baal)", I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips.' It is as though the experience of God

can only be expressed through a continual renegotiation of register, with every conceivable resource of rhetoric pressed into service as representation becomes re-presentation. It is a total immersion in this maturing dynamic, the refusal to absolutise even a heart of darkness, that lies behind Hosea becoming a key text in the New Testament for coming to terms with the resurrection of Jesus, and, in Hosea's own time, it exposes Canaanite ritual's glib routines of seasonal renewal as wishful thinking.

Narrative ambiguity and moral ambiguity merge in Hosea's portrayal of Jacob, alongside perhaps the most startling instances of the prophet's radical allusiveness and habitual elision and compression. What, in literary terms, is a highly unorthodox character sketch, follows on a flurry of national names – Ephraim, Israel and Judah (11:12-12:2) – which suggests a collective identity crisis following the fracturing of the Jewish people into two kingdoms. Hosea typically focuses on the unsettling meaning of Jacob's renaming as Israel ('he struggled with God') to foreground the mystery of the Genesis story. Jacob is first mentioned as the embodiment of Judah and due for punishment (12:2). His grasping personality is already established in the womb, clutching his twin's heel, and this is immediately linked to the mature Jacob struggling with God (12:3). Hosea identifies the mysterious man who wrestles with Jacob as 'the angel' (12:4) but adds 'he wept and begged for his favour' which strangely merges the account of the angel begging for release with that of the triumphant Jacob begging for a blessing, and with the only times Jacob is mentioned in Genesis as weeping – when he falls in love with Rachel at first sight, and when he meets Esau again on the morning after the night spent wrestling at Peniel. The intensity of this compacting is further heightened when Hosea continues, 'He found himself at Bethel and talked with him there,' (12:4) where the reader is left to infer that the nominative pronoun which you would naturally identify at first with Jacob actually refers to God. This is interrupted by a prophetic exhortation (12:5-6), by the outrageously complacent bragging of a well-heeled Ephraim (12:7-8) and God's own announcement: 'I will make you live in tents again' (12:9). The story of Jacob is resumed but in chronological flashback. It is as though telling the story backwards and ending with an unenlightened earlier Jacob enacts the nation's spiritual degeneration. But the overall impression from Hosea's treatment of the Jacob story is that his collective namesake Israel is no longer capable of the intense relationship with God experienced by the patriarch, which redeemed his faults.

It is striking that it should be in Chapter 12 with the re-emergence of something like a narrative in Hosea's treatment of the Jacob story, that this prophet's characteristic habit of omitting conjunctions becomes especially stark. In particular leaving out the expected 'and' – that trade mark of Old Testament narrative – means that the reader is left to supply the connection between phrases which are thus juxtaposed instead of being sequentially related. And in Jacob's case, this involvement of the reader is also an aspect of the way Hosea elides Jacob's complicated relationship with people in the Genesis account to focus on his relationship with God.

The profusion of imagery in Hosea also makes the point that is at the heart of Hebrew Biblical poetry – that basic structure of two or sometimes more lines which are in ever varying degrees similar/dissimilar, that creative interplay of relativity and certainty which celebrates the God with whom nothing is impossible (Matthew 19:26, Mark 10:27, Luke 18:23), who both forbids representation of himself and commands worship employing the images of himself inspired by him.

With the visionary element invested so directly in the words themselves, the effect is of a vocabulary being found and a language taking shape, the fruit of a subliminally sensed structure. The good news which Israel has forgotten has become its collective unconscious, emerging in protest against a culture of national 'secularisation' and spiritual junk food in which words proliferate through the displacement actions of pointless political manoeuvring and a spirit of litigation 'like poisonous weeds in a ploughed field' (10:4). It is only through becoming embroiled in the disorienting encounter with God Hosea describes that he is finally able to encourage his audience to return to God, not by the now discredited motions of animal sacrifice but by offering 'the fruit of our lips' (14:2). This is the culmination of a pun which runs throughout the book of Hosea between the word for 'fruit' and the similar-sounding word 'Ephraim' which is the prophet's most frequent designation for faithless Israel.

Chapter 11 is the molten core of Hosea's prophecy. God takes the initiative, rewriting the concept of the creator as a temporally remote first cause of cosmic events to proclaim the even more inconceivable good news that 'our' actions can never be of and for ourselves alone because God's heart is at the heart of what we do and that means his compassion, because what we experience seems to be primarily our alienation from him. It is as the expression of God that 'now' becomes as much of a catchphrase for Hosea as 'immediately' is for Mark's Gospel.

If Hosea is initially told that his marriage will become a parable of his country's relationship – and lack of relationship – with the divine, what he discovers through this is that the human story is not God's story. Parable does not become a pretext – in the most literal sense – for spiritualization as it does, for example, in the Qu'ran, and as it does not, most graphically of all, in the parables of Jesus with their wonderfully intriguing resistance to comprehensive allegorisation.

The techniques and rhetorical strategies which twentieth century modernism has deployed to promote a self-referential mystique of the divinisation of art itself, in Hosea attest to the mystery in which God's tumultuous heart exceeds all human categorization, expression and understanding. The defining formal characteristic of literary modernism has been a radically sceptical approach to narrative, whether this takes the form of enhancing the portrayal of multiple perspective or more obvious chronological disruption, setting up a Manichaean juxtaposition between a tsunami of minutiae and ghostly archetypes. One particular consequence of sitting loose to narrative in modernism has been an embarrassment about 'closure' and sometimes the provision of an apparent 'alternative ending', intended to advertise the author's impeccable open-mindedness and democratic credentials. What actually happens with this, for example in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, is always bogus because only one ending can actually engage the author's imagination. But in Hosea the alternative ending is not a matter of being awarded some badge of an illusory involvement in the creation of art but of being personally put on question by the creator who is not inhibited by human limitation. Hosea can only direct attention to the forgotten story and history of deliverance by showing that story cannot contain all that needs to be said. But the art at work in what he writes is also testimony that theology should always be the first to admit that God cannot be limited to theology.

A Tale of a Trope: Ubi Sunt and its Analogues in English Verse

Walter Nash

There are turns of phrase, common in conversation and reminiscence, when the good old days call in for a chat. 'Where are they now?' is one such, 'What happened to him?' is another. When such a turn of phrase settles into a rhetorical proposition, it becomes a *trope*, with a Latin name - *ubi sunt* – following the example of that great light of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c.480-524 A.D.) in Bk. II, *metrum* 7, of his *De Consolatione Philosophiae*:

Ubi nunc fidelis ossa Fabricii manent,
quod Brutus aut rigidus Cato?

Where now lie the bones of loyal Fabricius,
and what of Brutus now, or Cato the strict?

The fame of such worthies, Boethius tells us, is the glory of a mere name, spelt out on a tombstone with a little handful of letters. What he decries and pities is the emptiness of name and fame. Even when great works famously outlive the fallen name, they too are overtaken by time, and so the name dies a second death. This comment on the vanity of human wishes, a European *motif*, has been variously reflected in English verse, whenever poets have asked, where are the men of action, where are the lovers and their lasses, where are the wits, where are the wise men, where are the good and the great, where the politicians and the statesmen. It is a theme with sundry variations.

§

The *ubi sunt* trope makes a noble debut in English in the tenth century, in the fine poem called *The Wanderer*.¹ There it occurs with a preliminary, a haunting passage lamenting the nameless victims of violent mishap;

Some were those who met their death in battle:
this one a great bird carried out to sea
this one the grey wolf did to death
this one a knight of mournful countenance
hid in an earthen cave

In the original this is a 'sum-sequence', a set of clauses in parallel, constructed on inflected variants of the pronoun *sum*, meaning 'a certain one'. Then follows, a few lines later, a passionate lament

Where now the horse? Where now the horseman? Where now his bountiful lord?
Where now the halls where once we feasted? What of our revels now?

¹ The best edition of this poem in fullness of apparatus and attention to textual detail, is that of T.P.Dunning and A.J.Bliss, *The Wanderer*, London, [1969] 1973. The translations used here are my own.

THE GLASS

O burnished cup, O warrior mailed,
O glory of the chief! How time has fled,
Gone, under cover of night, as though it had never been.

This mentions no names. It is an elegy, for men, obviously, but men of the warrior caste. It evokes completely the Saxon world of the mead-hall and the chief's close company of proven warriors, in the Saxon phrase the *duguð*, 'doughty ones'. Its grief is for the lordless and the landless, the vanquished who of late were victors.

§

Three centuries after *The Wanderer*, in the time of King Henry III (1216-1272), the form of poetic *ubi sunt* is the rhymed lyric, its function being to support pious teaching and moral inculcation. Its practitioners are, seemingly, priests, or friars, and the objects of fraternal exhortation include powerful men and marriageable girls. Thus Thomas de Hales, *de ordine fratrum minorum* (Franciscans) writes, at great length, a *Luue-Ron* – 'love poem' – for a young virgin, counselling her to put aside all thought of worldly love and become a bride of Christ. His *ubi sunt* shapes the ninth of the poem's twenty-seven opulent stanzas, but is effectively the hinge of the whole recital:

Where is Paris, and Helene,
Who were so bright and fair to see,
Amadas and Idoine,
Tristram and all that company,
Hector, with his fighters keen,
Caesar, that held the world in fee?
They are all gone from our worldly scene
As the wheatsheaf goes from the lea.¹

The burden of what follows is that romantic lovers and rich husbands are unsatisfactory, because, after all, they only die; better for a girl with a dowry to invest it in a nunnery and enter into everlasting wedlock with the eternal husband, the Lord Christ. That is perhaps a crude summary of an argument that reads more affably in early Middle English.

From the same period, but perhaps a little later in date, and from a different dialect region, (the SE, including London). comes a lyric entitled, in the MS, *Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt*. It is in essence a homily, denouncing the pride and presumption of people past, and urging those present to reform and conform, to accept suffering, defy the devil and stand up for the truth, or *iustitiam facere* 'do the right thing'. The opening stanzas put the *ubi sunt* question:

Where are they now, who lived before?
To hounds they rode, and hawks they bore,
... Masters of every place,
The wealthy ladies in their bowers
Wore gold entwined in their coiffures,
... And kept a shining face.

¹ My translation of a poem in the dialect of the SW Midlands (the poet was from Hailes in Gloucestershire). It imitates the metre, follows the rhyme-pattern, and in general attempts 'sense for sense' with the remainder.

THE GLASS

They ate and drank, they lived for play,
In sport their lives were passed away,
... Men knelt to them anon,
They bore their self-regard so high --
And in the twinkling of an eye
... Their very souls were gone.¹

What follows, in homiletic consequence, builds on the image of the Christian man as a 'champion', wielding his pilgrim staff, as though in tournament, in single combat against a well-armed enemy, and compelling this adversary at last to admit defeat. This unremitting fight, says the preacher, will secure an entry into the 'myrie londe' (happy land) of Heaven, to know the eternal peace of God. The poem ends with a form of doxology, invoking the Virgin Mary:

Maiden-mother, queen Marie,
... Who might and can and stands to be
Our shield against the fiend
... Help us to put the foe to flight
That we may of thy Son have sight
... In bliss without an end

§

Lyric forms like these outline, explicitly, the discursive process of the trope. It begins with the formulaic 'signature' the question; moves on to name names or state identities; expands into characteristics or actions of the persons named or types identified; then answers the originating query with a comment-in-consequence, or act of judgment. The lyric form allows this 'explicit' organization. Departure from the lyric makes the organization less explicit. There is, for example, a muddled and troubled instance of *ubi sunt* in *Hamlet* Act V, Scene I, the familiar 'graveyard' scene. Hamlet learns, from a gravedigger, that a skull disturbed in opening a grave is that of Yorick, court jester in the prince's boyhood, 'a fellow of infinite jest, of the most excellent fantasy'. He takes the skull and apostrophises, 'Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment, that were wont set the table on a roar?' It seems like the onset, albeit in prose, of an explicit *ubi sunt* trope, but the recital goes adrift because Prince Hamlet has his own questions, privy questions, to ask, about his mother's behaviour, Ophelia's wounded innocence, his father's death, the death of a great soldier at the hands of the murderer his mother married. His vision is not of time past and time present, but of a world deflowered, defiled, and defilement puts the illustrious dead to muddy uses:

Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away,
O, that that earth, which kept the earth in awe
Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw!

Curiously, one phrase, 'that earth, which kept the earth in awe', pre-echoes

¹ Translation from the text in Carleton Brown, *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*, Oxford 1932; also included in Bruce Dickins & R.M.Wilson, *Early Middle English Texts*, Bowes & Bowes, Cambridge 1951. Both books include the *Luue-Ron*, see above.

another, 'the name, at which the world grew pale' from a great poem published some 150 years later.

§

Samuel Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), an 'imitation' of Juvenal's tenth satire, also dwells, at eloquent length, on the emptiness of reputations. His method, following Juvenal's prescription, is to write memorials, whether of human prototypes at large (the scholar, the lawyer, the traveller, the writer, the petitioner), or at times giving fuller, 'named' treatment to people of some importance in their own day, describing their characters, their powers and achievements in full career, then delineating the events leading to a downfall, and concluding with a summary postscript, passing judgment.

Among these 'biographical' poems undoubtedly the most distinguished is one commemorating the life, death, and after-fame of a military genius, King Charles XII of Sweden (1698-1718), whose lifetime barely overlapped with Johnson's. (Johnson was born in 1709.) Juvenal's *exemplum* is the great Carthaginian general, Hannibal, who frightened Rome almost to death, was defeated by Scipio at Zama in 202, and died in exile, by his own hand, in 183 B.C. Juvenal, born in A.D. 60, was thus invoking history at a far cry; Johnson, on the other hand, was citing a comparatively modern instance.

Juvenal's lines begin with typical verve: *Expende Hannibalem*, 'Put Hannibal on the scales', he writes, 'how many pounds weight will you now find in *that* great captain?' – meaning, in what is left of his fame, for indeed Hannibal the man is long gone. Johnson turns this excursus from a command into a polite option:

On what foundations stand the warrior's pride,
How just his hopes, let Swedish Charles decide.

(Metrical note: readers who weigh the reading rightly will accent 'his' in the second line of this introductory couplet.) The introduction is tentative. It might be paraphrased, 'Take Charles XII, for example', and that, in turn, might imply a question, 'What became of Charles XII?' Though the *ubi sunt* signature, 'where...?' occurs nowhere in the text, yet the text creates a feel of *ubi est*; we might then call it an *analogue* of the process, a comparable pattern.

After this beginning, the poem moves promptly into a description of Charles' constitution and temperament ('a frame of adamant, a soul of fire / no dangers fright him and no labours tire'), his obsessive passion for war, his victories over 'surrounding kings', his determination to invade Russia and capture the city of Moscow, till 'all be mine beneath the polar sky'. So the campaign goes, all hardships braved, all resistance overcome, until the mischance of 'Pultowa's day', a crushing defeat by Peter the Great's army, at Poltava. Then follows the tale of his flight, his exile in the Ukraine, his uneasy survival as a refugee playing the supplicant, 'while ladies interpose, and slaves debate.' At last comes a question the sympathetic reader is invited to ask,

But did not Chance at length her error mend?
Did no subverted empire mark his end?
Did rival monarchs give the fatal wound?
Or hostile millions press him to the ground?

This, had it happened, would have been an exit on a heroic scale. But it was not to be for Charles. He died trying to expel the Danes from Norway, laying siege to the little fortress of Fredrikshald and overseeing operations from an observation trench. Someone's pistol or musket ball, fired from the fort or from his own side, shot him clean through the head.

His fall was destined to a barren strand,
A petty fortress and a dubious hand.
He left the name, at which the world grew pale,
To point a moral, and adorn a tale.

The 'moral', some might say, is Solomon's verdict in Ecclesiastes 9:11, 'the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ... but time and chance happeneth to them all.'¹ Others might think chapter and verse 9:18 more appropriate, 'Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.' That would have been to the point, if this were explicitly an *ubi sunt* poem and not, as suggested, a text of comparable narrative design.

§

Move on sixty years, into the nineteenth century, and *ubi sunt*, apparently not much employed by the Augustans,² returns with a flourish in the master-work of a displaced Augustan: Lord Byron, in his *Don Juan*. Anyone acquainted with that work will know that Byron, at his radical, roistering best, is a superb mimic, not only a quick imitator of styles and an Olympian maker of doggerel rhymes, but also one who catches the inflections, the 'idiolect', the characteristic 'tone of voice' of those he imitates. He even imitates his own tone of voice.

In Canto XI of the poem, Juan's experiences in London, as a special envoy of the Empress Catherine of Russia, have him moving among the social, literary, political and other *prominenti*, and this leads Byron into sprightly reflections on his own years of the high life, passed largely among what now might be called 'celebrities'. He begins to wonder where eight whole years have gone, and so begins an *ubi sunt* trope, exercised through nine brisk, footworking rounds of *ottava rima*:

'Where is the world?' cries Young, at eighty – 'Where
... The world in which a man was born?' Alas.
Where is the world of eight years past? 'Twas there –
... I look for it – 'tis gone, a globe of glass!
Crack'd, shiver'd, vanish'd, scarcely gazed on, ere
A silent change dissolves the glittering mass,
Statesmen, chiefs, orators, queens, patriots, kings,
And dandies, all are gone on the wind's wings.

There follows a virtuoso recital, surveying the condition of Britain, in all aspects of politics, economy, society, arts. Byron has wryly observed it all:

¹ This is the 'moral' suggested by the Swedish poet, essayist, novelist, scholar, Frans G. Bengtsson (1894-1954) in his essay on Karl XII in the collection *Litteratörer och Militärer*, Albert Bonnier, Stockholm, 1944.

² The term 'Augustan' connotes a preference for rational discourse and an aversion to verbal games, e.g. 'clinchés' (puns) and 'false wit', e.g. metaphysical imagery. 'Enthusiasm' (in religion, the ardent claim to private revelation) was deplored.

THE GLASS

I have seen small poets, and great prozers, and
... Interminable – not eternal – speakers –
I have seen the funds at war with house and land –
... I have seen the country gentlemen turn squeakers –
I have seen the people ridden o'er like sand
... By slaves on horseback – I have seen 'malt liquors'
Exchanged for 'thin potations' by John Bull –
I have seen John half detect himself a fool.¹

His 'eight years' viewed in retrospect are from 1823, when canto XI was written, back to 1815, the year of victory at Waterloo, since when, he nimbly implies, the whole country has managed to go more or less to the dogs. But the poetic use of this long passage is to serve, like other interludes of wit-writing or mimicry in other cantos, as a welcome distraction from the ongoing plod (let it be said) of Juan's amatory career, from innocence seduced to curiously passive rakishness. The *ubi sunt* recital works here as a 'spacing' device. It is a lively impromptu, serves a purpose, and is discarded as cheerfully as it was begun.

§

The younger Romantics seem to have had little if any use for formal, explicit, *ubi sunt*. Keats picks it up in his *Ode to a Nightingale* and promptly drops it: 'Where are the songs of spring?' he asks, and answers, 'Aye, where are they?' before getting on to the matter in hand. In Shelley there is always a 'matter in hand'. In neither poet is the past ignored – how could that be? – but the present is where everything memorable is. Later, the mid-Victorian Tennyson was gripped by the 'passion of the past' (his words), but it was his own past that gripped him, as his *In Memoriam* shows, at some length. Some of Browning's great dramatic monologues, e.g. *My Last Duchess*, might be interpreted as analogues of *ubi sunt*. 'That's my *last* Duchess' (note the accent, reader); and in case you, or the Count's envoy, were asking 'where is she now?' your urbane host will go on to explain why he had her killed. Then Thomas Hardy, in his remembrances of the Wessex that was, and, indeed, the Wessex he created, comes near to the substance and shiver of *ubi sunt*. Thus in his poem *Friends Beyond*:

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough
... Robert's kin, and John's and Ned's,
And the Squire and Lady Susan, lie in Mellstock church-yard now!

But he tells us where they all are before we have thought of asking; and these are not even real people, they are characters or minor personnel in his own writings

The nineteenth century, did, however, introduce something quite new, a product of popular sentiment, sheet music, and veteran pianos clunking in lounge bars or little sitting rooms. This was the parlour ballad, as sung on the old Sunday evenings at home, on Saturdays in the working men's clubs, on guest night at the Masonic Hall. Chord progressions were simple, texts unambiguous:

¹ I do not quite know why 'malt liquors' is set in quotes, except this: the OED, under 'malt', lists 'to drink malt liquors' as 'a vulgarism' dating from 1818, which is just the right period. 'Thin potations' quotes Falstaff in *Henry IV* Part II, Act iv, Scene iii, line 131, 'If I had a thousand sons, the first human example I would teach them would be, to forswear thin potations.'

THE GLASS

Where are the boys of the old Brigade,
Who fought with us side by side?
Shoulder to shoulder and blade by blade
Fought till they fell and died!
Who so ready and undismayed?
Who so merry and true?
Where are the boys of the old Brigade?
Where are the lads we knew?

The author of this is one Fred E. Weatherly (1848-1928) a graduate of Brasenose College, Oxford (where Walter Pater was his tutor). After graduation he spent some years as a 'crammer' for the duller students, and made up his income by writing poems, songs, children's books, 'and some verses for Christmas cards, but not mottoes for crackers, I drew the line there.' The second stanza of *The Old Brigade*, after an intervening chorus, answers the question posed in the first:

Over the sea far away they lie
... Far from the land of their love;
Nations alter, the years go by,
... But Heav'n is still Heav'n above.
Not in the abbey proudly laid
... Find they a place or part:
The gallant boys of the old Brigade,
... They sleep in old England's heart.

The poem's sincere patriotism and simple piety have not guaranteed it a place that I know of in any anthology of Victorian verse,¹ but its musical setting, by Odoardo Barri, alias Edward Slater (1844-1920) is still quite well known as the tune to which the Chelsea Pensioners once marched, or extremely slow-marched, on Remembrance Day

The setting often enables the survival of a poem. This I can personally attest from recollection of my boyhood's introduction to the *ubi sunt* trope, in 1935 or thereabouts. It came out of my father's ancient gramophone, flower-horned and hissing, and a baritone voice, the voice of Peter Dawson, precisely a-r-t-i-c-u-l-a-t-i-n-g, with sumptuous melancholy,

Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar
... Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell?
Whom do you lead on Rapture's roadway, far
... Before you agonise them in farewell?
Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,
... Where are you now? Where are you now?

This was a setting of a poem, *Kashmiri Song*, written in 1901 by Laurence Hope, alias Adela Florence Nicolson (1864-1904), English feminist, Indian *memsahib*, African traveller, begetter of many amorous verses. In the following year the composer Amy Woodforde-Finden (1860-1909) wrote a setting of *Kashmiri Song*, that melody that had my father listening drowsily, with half-shut eyes, the tune

1 My source, for words, music, and comment, is *The Parlour Song Book, A Casquet of Vocal Gems*, edited and introduced by Michael R. Turner, Pan Books, 1974.

that nearly anyone still knows, though the words, apart, perhaps, from the first two lines, are mostly forgotten¹

§

Just over a decade later, in 1915, the American poet Edgar Lee Masters (1868-1950) was to publish his *Spoon River Anthology*, one of the most remarkable of 'modern' works, a compilation of more than two hundred brief, free-verse epitaphs on little, flawed lives in a little imaginary township in Illinois.² The dead are made to speak for themselves, and in doing so, reveal what they are, what they think they are, and what they think others think they are; and by and by the pictured community of a hamlet, Spoon River, can be discerned as an ironic portrait of a larger community, America. The first section of the anthology, a long poem called *The Hill*, is relatively free from ironic intent. It opens with an elegy for the ordinary dead, people with little more than their names to be forgotten by:

Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley,
The weak of will, the strong of arm, the clown, the boozier, the fighter?
All, all are sleeping on the hill.

One passed in a fever
One was burned in a mine
One was killed in a brawl
One died in a jail
One fell from a bridge toiling for children and wife.
All, all are sleeping on the hill.

Here is the *ubi sunt* trope, in a form curiously familiar to anyone who might come upon it after reading *The Wanderer*. The one – one -- one, a 'sum-sequence' particularly suggests an imitation. It is not certain, however, that Masters was consciously 'copying' a supposed model; only that he was disposed to what critics used to call 'unconscious reminiscence' (an oxymoron if ever there was one), implying the existence, somewhere in the mind, of a residual pattern, a flow of remembrance; 'the form remains', as Wordsworth said of the River Duddon, 'the function never dies'.

Form and function were still undying forty-five years later when Pete Seeger wrote, and sang, his lyric, *Where have all the flowers gone?* It was a protest against the Vietnam War, an *ubi sunt* poem of ingenious structure, and further, a lyric like a *corona*, or *carole*, turning from the end to find its beginning:

Where have all the flowers gone?
Long time passing
Where have all the flowers gone?

¹ In her brief life Hope/Nicolson had three collections published, one, *The Garden of Kama* Heinemann, London 1901, a second, *The Star of the Desert*, was published posthumously in 1905, then *Indian Love* in the same year. She was a popular poet, admired by at least two fellow-poets (James Elroy Flecker and Thomas Hardy), but durable name and textbook fame have completely eluded her.

² Edgar Lee Masters (1869-1950) published the first edition of *Spoon River Anthology* in 1915, with Macmillan, New York. Its fame was instant, and has lasted to this day, in numberless analyses, citations, productions, imitations, translations, etc. Text usefully available online, via Google.

THE GLASS

Long time ago
Where have all the flowers gone?
Girls have picked them every one
When will they ever learn?
When will they ever learn?

In the second stanza the pattern is repeated, with this as question and answer:

Where have all the young girls gone?
Taken husbands every one.

And so to the third:

Where have all the young men gone?
Gone for soldiers every one.

And to the fourth, but not quite the last:

Where have all the soldiers gone?
Gone to the graveyard every one –

Here the poem's narrative is complete, but there remains this:

Where have all the graveyards gone?
Covered with flowers every one.

Which brings us back to the beginning, 'Where have all the flowers gone?' This wheelabout might be repeated indefinitely. The song was a popular success, all the more successful because it was, and is, something more than a 'pop' song. Fittingly, it makes the last entry in this tale of a trope, which has now come within summary hail of the present time

Ubi sunt is the name of a function with diverse forms, in perspectives veering from elegy to satire, with purposes shifting from remembrance to reaction, from reaction to prescription, from prescription to instruction, from instruction to pleasure. Its recurrences – 'where will it go next?' – cannot be predicted. If asked, I would have to say, God only knows, or wills, and He needs no addition to His name and fame.

Les neiges d'antan

...

Dictes moy ou n'en quel pays
Est Flora le belle Romaine
Archipiades, ne Thaïs,
Qui fut sa cousine germaine,
Echo parlant quant ruyt ou maire
Dessus riviere ou sus estan,
Que beaultè ot trop plus qu'humaine.
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?

Tell me where, in which country
Is Flora, the beautiful Roman;
Archipiada (?), and Thaïs
Who was her cousin;
Echo, speaking when one makes noise
Over river or on pond,
Who had a beauty too much more than human?
Oh, where are the snows of yesteryear!

François Villon's fifteenth century *Ballade des dames du temps jadis* lamented the passing of time and of beauty.

Book Reviews

Anthony C. Swindell, *How Contemporary Novelists Rewrite Stories from the Bible: The Interpretation of Scripture in Literature*, New York/Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press, 2009, vi+356 pp., £74.95, 978 0 773 44764 6

Literary interpretations of scripture have the potential to alienate or offend every reader, regardless of sensibility. Orthodox Christians could protest that the imperative to read the Bible as any 'other book' – a phenomenon that took root in Victorian thought with the advent of the Higher Criticism – diminishes the divine status of a sacred text. T. S. Eliot is amongst those twentieth-century writers to demur at the idea that the Jewish-Christian canon has been influential on literature for its aesthetic qualities rather than as the 'report' of the Word of God. C. S. Lewis was similarly unsympathetic to the privileging of artistic value in the act of reading the Book of books: 'I cannot help suspecting,' he once cautioned, 'that those who read the Bible as literature do not read the Bible'. Sceptics, secularists and tough-talking New Atheists, meanwhile, might be unhappy that any religious writings – particularly those that claim to derive from revelation rather than reason – should be taken seriously for any motive other than demystification.

Despite these polarized perspectives, the interdisciplinary field of Biblical-literary studies – a generously inclusive subject-area (or one that is worryingly imprecise, depending on your point of view) that embraces philology, linguistics, sociology, gender critiques, literary theory and even (whisper it) *a little theology* – has transcended the limits of transient academic fashion. In the near-three decades since the publication of Northrop Frye's *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1982), scholars as diverse as Harold Bloom, David Lyle Jeffrey, Regina Schwartz and Robert Alter have pursued complex hermeneutic questions regarding genre, readership and – more divisively – meaning in relation to the canon. More recently, multi-authored collections such as *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature* and *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, focusing on individual texts, writers and movements, are indicative of the continuing importance of these questions in current literary-religious debate. Anthony C. Swindell's study, *How Contemporary Novelists Rewrite Stories from the Bible* (subtitled *The Interpretation of Scripture in Literature*), is a lively and undeniably ambitious contribution to this evolving body of research. The book is divided into fourteen chapters followed by two appendices (a review of Glen Most's *Doubting Thomas* and an overview of Julie Sanders *Adaptation and Appropriation*), a bibliography and a helpful index. Terry Wright, one of the most distinguished scholars working in the interstices between literature and theology, also contributes a typically thoughtful preface. Indeed, Wright's *The Genesis of Fiction: Modern Novelists as Biblical Interpreters* (2007) provides an interesting counterpoint to Swindell's study. *The Genesis of Fiction* restricts its focus to interpretations of foundational narratives from a single Biblical book and pursues, with an eye for delicate detail, the nuances of individual writers (chapters focus, for example, on John Steinbeck, Thomas Mann and Mark Twain). The current study, by contrast, to quote Wright's foreword offers a 'breadth of vision', and the book addresses interpretations that traverse canonical and apocryphal writings.

The real focus, identified in the introduction, is 'an examination of fourteen monographs written by fourteen different authors over a period of thirty years on the subject of the treatment of specific Biblical stories in literature, art and theology, mainly in that order of priority'. These reception-histories, published between 1972 to 1982, Swindell notes, represent 'the bulk of all such works published in English between 1982 and 2002'. These texts include J. D. Levenson's *The Book of Job in its Time and in the Twentieth-Century* (1972), Marina Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex* (1976) – an exploration of the cult of the Virgin Mary – and Yvonne Sherwood's *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (2000). Chapter 2 ('A Survey of the Principal Texts') is, in my view, the strongest and most distinctive section of the book. It works well as a meta-commentary on these commentaries and does a particularly good job of indicating the dizzying range of readings that appear possible in the postmodern moment.

I have two significant criticisms, both of which are related to structure and focus. Firstly, the book is not well served by a title that initially appears to be a model of clarity but which does not, in fact, accurately reflect the substance of Swindell's study. The title would have served this engaging work much better had it indicated that its primary focus is the evolving reception history of Biblical narrative. This it does very ably and the material on Warner, Sherwood et al. is both clearly articulated and neatly organized. The material on fiction, however, is less carefully structured. Imaginative literature is not explored in any detail until Chapter Four (which begins 119 pages into the work). Even at this stage, it would be something of a stretch to claim that the epithet 'contemporary novelist' might be applied to Milton and Byron; similarly, although D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce are certainly novelists, contemporary, in any meaningful sense, they are not. Although the work of a number of living novelists is explored – Margaret Atwood, Michèle Roberts, David Maine and Tom Robbins, for example – this material is not prioritized. Secondly, the book attempts rather too much for a single volume and the focus on the specific reception histories is lost. The analysis of the large range of literary texts is fine – thoughtful, relevant and informed – but far too diverse for any substantial argument to be developed. Many (but not all) of the literary works chosen are those discussed in the fourteen reception-histories under review in the first part of the book. A tighter focus with fewer literary case studies – and fewer chapters – might have allowed Swindell's fascinating exploration of the reception-history phenomenon to be given more space.

Despite my reservations, I believe that elements of the study – specifically those that deal with the key reception-histories and other vital figures in the field (Frye, Pierre Boitani, Robert Alter, Nicholas Boyle and others) – will prove very useful to the many scholars working in the wide, diverse and evolving field of literary and Biblical studies.

Andrew Tate

Deborah C. Bowen, *Stories of the Middle Space: Reading the Ethics of Postmodern Realisms*, McGill-Queen's University Press (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca), 2010, 282pp., US&CA\$95, 978 0 7735 3689 0

This is in many aspects an admirable attempt to theorise a Christian or Christianized hermeneutic for Now. Admirable too in trying to demonstrate ways in which many fictions, or sort-of-fictions, of Now – what Deborah Bowen would have us think of as ‘postmodern-realist’ writings – are open to her Christianized reading. Open because they are, as she finds no trouble in showing, engaged in the very issues that her hermeneutic rather impressively centres – issues of presence, history, reference, ethics, all of them side-lined in some post-structuralist, post-modernist theorising; preoccupations driven, as Bowen would have it, by their post-Judaeo-Christian, or even post-post-Judaeo-Christian, genetics and animations.

The theorizing here of a ‘Christian’ reading and textuality does have force. The Christian reader, Bowen keeps suggesting, occupies with happiness a ‘middle space’ of writing. With happiness because she (always she in this account) recognises that this is an, as it were, incarnational space, the zone of the human particular, the *realia*, the world, which God in Christ was incarnated into. To be sure, the geometry of this space is a bit unsettled – now it’s a triangulated area, with author-God at the apex, and word and world as the opposite vertices of the base; now (and dominantly as the critical narrative goes) it’s an interactive area merely between word and world. A slippage of spatial metaphors coming about, perhaps, because Bowen does want her Christian reading-model to have valency, or at least appeal, for non-Christians, who most certainly are not fetched by the idea of God as the power at the apex of any reading-writing transaction.

But however constructed, a ‘middle-space’ is where ethical engagements occur. Ethicities powered, in some fashion or another, by Judaeo-Christian considerations. Especially fuelled, Bowen suggests, by Levinas’s face-to-face encounters and Bakhtin’s heteroglossia – Jewish Levinas, of course, and Russian Orthodox Bakhtin, naturally. Modelled, too, by Gerard Hopkins’s poetic selvings through encounters with God’s creation, His ‘mortal things’ – God incarnate in the world and in the poem about the world. Iris Murdoch, great post-Christian moral philosopher, theorist and fictionalizing ethicist, makes a supporting doctrinal appearance, as she should, albeit a bit late in the day of Bowen’s narrative, courtesy of A. S. Byatt’s enthusiasm for Murdoch’s famous ‘Against Dryness’ essay. (There’s lots of Byatt in Bowen’s story.) Bowen is, of course, well aware of the modern, and indeed postmodern, dismissal of Christianity as in any way an ethical force-for-good – in the form of attacks on Christianized power, patriarchalism, colonialism, heterosexuality and so forth; but she has no polemical problem in placing and thus slighting those considerations as aberrations from the true Christian ethical core. Mainly in place here, it quickly becomes apparent, are the ethics of the text, of the written thing. An ethics of reading is constantly implied, though never fully articulated. If it were, there would have to be much more discussion of the old practical-theoretical issue of non-Christian, even atheistic ethic: what might be called, as Bowen occasionally does, the question of ‘common grace’.

The textual cases chosen for Bowen’s demonstrations of how real presences, ethical considerations, and so on, the traces of the old Judaeo-Christian belief systems – all those Levinasian, Bakhtinian and later-Derridean interests so foolishly proscribed in lots of knee-jerk post-structuralist stereotypings – go on

preoccupying modern writings, even ones, perhaps especially ones, undoing, parodying, joshing such religious and religious things, are assembled in four canny groups: fictions rewriting histories; magic-realist fictions; parodists of sacred myths and stories; and texts which discuss and use photographs as cases of historical evidence. A. S. Byatt's 'Sugar', about memory and the ethics of story, kicks off the first group, hotly followed by Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, Christianized story of Japanese Canadians interned in the Second World War, and by Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger* about a 'kaleidoscopic' historian dealing with Rommel in that war, and Rushdie's great Indian-Independence novel *Midnight's Children*. The 'magic realists' are Rushdie (again), Jeanette Winterson and her seventeenth-century radical feminist novel *Sexing the Cherry*, and Jane Urquhart and her take on anthropological writing, *Away*. The sacred-story parodists are Thomas Green's native-Canadian creation stories in *Green Grass, Running Water*; Julian Barnes's (roughly speaking) essayistic revisionary Ark narratives in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*; and Timothy Fielden's sexed-up Holocaust dossier *Not Wanted on Voyage*. Bowen's dealing with the historicity of the photographic text and the valency of photographs in autobiographical narratives begins, as it should, with Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, and goes on to Michael Ignatieff's *Russian Album*, Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*, and Carol Shield's novel with photos *The Stone Diaries*. (This section is by far Bowen's strongest.)

These selected authors and texts fit Bowen's critical mould with more or less aptness. It is, of course, hard to squeeze Rushdie into Bowen's dominant Judaeo-Christian frame, however much the Indian religiosities of his historical-textual manoeuvres have Judaeo-Christian parallels. And Bowen's main ethical issues do rather drift out of sight in some of her discussions of texts. And there's a lot more to stress about Roland Barthes's Protestant Christian heritage and frames of thought, than Bowen does. And so on. What discontents more, though, is the resolute Canadianness of this venture. Seven of Bowen's textualizing people are Canadian. And her undoubtedly important critiques need testing on more non-Canadian big beasts of the Winterson, Byatt, Barnes, Barthes kind. (There's too much an air here of authors straggling in from a Canadian University course on Canadian writers set up to keep otherwise bored Canadian students coming to class.) Of Bowen's Canadians only Ondaatje has world importance. With Carol Shields, a possible world-runner. And even in the matter of the important Ondaatje I doubt that his memoir *Running in the Family* should be the chosen case of an historicizing narrative using a photograph, rather than Ondaatje's truly significant *Coming Through Slaughter*, where the problematic of a photograph's evidentiality as historical and narrative material is so powerfully expounded. By the same sort of token, this most important of critical engagements cries out for a consideration of W.G. Sebald's historiographic-metatextual (to borrow a phrase) texts, so packed with illustrative photographs apparently garnered contingently from junk-shops and bric-a-brac stalls. Just so, Bowen's several Byatt engagements deserve at the least being hooked onto Byatt's *The Biographer's Tale*. And so on. What, I mean to say, about Winterson's *Art and Lies*, and Angela Carter, and Graham Swift, and ... and ...?

For I have no doubt that Bowen's repeated critical story of the return of the (Judaeo-Christian) ethical repressed of (post)modernist textuality would find a home away from her largely Canadian home. And should. It's a shame, and

limitation, that we have to live so much with the rustle of the home-grown maple leaf, the maple leaf (the maple leaf, forever?). Or, indeed, with Bowen's maple tree. The one outside her window as she thinks and writes, and which she can hardly stop invoking as standing for Hopkinsian this-ness, as bringing home the transcendent otherness of the realia allegedly penetrating the 'middle' spaces of her texts and her critical encounterings. The maple tree – and the deck she sits on, and the desk she sits at – about which we hear far, far too much. Annoyance with which intrusive autobiographicizing, this persistent self-siting, sighting and citing of the critic herself – Bowen's habit of keeping up with this terribly pervasive gimmick of our critical times – quite swamps the authenticating of the aesthetic, and ethical, encounter that it plainly craves.

Valentine Cunningham

Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic After 9/11*, Continuum, 2010, 160pp., £16.99 pb., 978 0 826 44629 9

Twenty-five years after the publication of Richard Dawkins's *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986), and a decade on from 9/11, the movement that has come to be referred to as 'the new atheism' is still going strong, claiming the moral high ground in order to wage Armageddon on the serried forces of the monolith 'religion'. The battle was fiercest a few years ago at the time of publication of Dawkins's *The God Delusion* (2006) and Hitchens's *God is not Great* (2007), but something is now changing. The change is not the result of the counter incursions of, say, Alister McGrath's *The Dawkins Delusion?* (2007), but rather the consequence of a growing sense amongst religionists, agnostics, and atheists alike that their respective positions are misrepresented by the intellectually-narrow and culturally-insensitive terms of the whole new atheist 'debate'. Thus alongside the ongoing sub-Hitchens diatribes of writers such as Polly Toynbee ('Sex and death lie at the poisoned heart of religion', 14/09/2010¹), *The Guardian* now also plays host to the milder manners of secular humanists such as Caspar Melville, editor of *New Humanist* magazine ('Beyond New Atheism?', 21/09/2010), and Julian Baggini, atheist philosopher ('Atheists and believers can get along', 17/10/2010). In the same month as Melville's piece, the RSA hosted a panel discussion 'After New Atheism: Where now for the God debate?' involving Marilynne Robinson, Roger Scruton, and Jonathan Rée; and Robinson herself has just published her deeply-weighed and sensitive Terry lectures on this same subject as *Absence of Mind* (Yale, 2010). Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate's excellent new book *The New Atheist Novel* is an important contribution to this counter-movement: counter-new-atheist that is, but without being 'religious' itself. The authors do not share a faith perspective (as they point out, one of them is an atheist, the other is a Christian), but what they do share is a distrust of a new atheist culture too readily prepared to package up and label 'religion' and its adherents with an astonishing political, historical and philosophical naivety.

One of the more surprising aspects of the new atheism has been its association with a group of contemporary British novelists. It is this loosely affiliated group of Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Philip Pullman, and Salman Rushdie that form the

¹ The *Guardian* article can be found using Google search with " " and the title.

focus of Bradley and Tate's discussion. The principal 'new atheist' credentials of these novelists have been their proclivity to sound off in the media and to publish essays on 'religion' in the wake of 9/11, and to cite approvingly one or other of the self-styled 'Four Horsemen of the Counter-Apocalypse': Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. For this reason, Bradley opens the book with a trenchant critique of the philosophical, political, and historical ignorance of the horsemen in question. The four chapters that follow explore different aspects of the relationship between the novelists under discussion and their new atheist sympathies. Bradley covers McEwan and Amis; Tate, Pullman and Rushdie. Each has a different inflection: the studies of Bradley are more theoretically and politically engaged, while Tate reflects more on the theological and literary aspects of the texts, but both explore the stated political and metaphysical opinions of these writers as a means to understanding their novels. In this respect, what unifies the discussion is the hermeneutical assumption that there is a self-evident relationship between the stated beliefs of an author and the meaning of his or her works. This can be a problematic argument, especially when the works of great authors such as Dickens or Wordsworth so far exceed the reach of their personal or political or religious convictions. In the work of lesser writers, however, that equation does seem to hold true to a greater extent, and it is interesting that in the present study, the most significant of the four novelists – Rushdie – also comes across as the least programmatically ideological, the least clearly 'new atheist'. The same cannot be said for Ian McEwan, a much more ideologically programmatic thinker, and – in my own view – an author with limited powers of physical visualization, who seems indifferent to the figurative, visual, and sonic resonance of words, and whose emotional relationship to his own characters calls to mind a jaded RSPCA inspector assessing livestock welfare in an abattoir. Pullman, who shares McEwan's relapses into mechanistic fiction, writes texts that offer to ideologically self-dismantle in the same way. Pullman never did quite gain the status of an atheist C. S. Lewis or J. K. Rowling, and while the Narnia and Harry Potter stories are still going strong, the sequels to the film of Pullman's *The Golden Compass* are on permanent hold. Reading Tate's chapter on Pullman gives some sense of why. The books are ideologically torturous, and too often attempt to enmesh rather than enchant the reader.

Despite this, *The New Atheist Novel* communicates a spirited interest in the texts under discussion, and is by no means an attempt to discredit the writers it examines, but rather seeks to explore the relationship of these texts to the ideological orbit of their authors. At many points Bradley and Tate find themselves on the same side as these writers, particularly when it is universal matters of cruelty and injustice that are in the spotlight. The book is both open and even-handed in this respect, and I conclude by offering an instance of the refreshingly straight-talking conclusion of their own work to give a sense of the approach of the book at large: 'To make our own stance absolutely clear, Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Philip Pullman and Salman Rushdie are right to challenge religion if and when it inspires anti-rationalism, misogyny, racism and terrorism. However, this book has tried to argue that their fictions are by no means immune to the very irrationalism, intolerance and ignorance they seek to contest.[...] Just like their philosophical and scientific comrades, Amis, McEwan, Pullman and Rushdie too often end up bearing witness to the sheer poverty of our public discourse on

religion at a time when caution, sensitivity and discrimination have never been more necessary.'

Jonathan Roberts

Philip Pullman, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, 2010, Canongate Books, 245pp, £14.99 hb, 978 1 847 67825 6

This intriguing work turns on what bookish folk might term a *conceit*, or admen a *high concept*, and what Alfred Hitchcock, in the craft of filmic narrative, would have called a *McGuffin*; that is, an invention supplying a plausible pretext for a remarkable tale. The McGuffin, Hitchcock tells us, initially steers the plot and guides, or as necessary distracts, the audience; subsequently it can serve deliberately to misdirect them; ultimately it may drop away altogether from the narrative, as characters in the drama take charge of developing events.

Philip Pullman, writer, works the McGuffin adeptly. His 'high concept' is this: two boys, celestially fathered, are born to Mary, in a stable in Bethlehem, on the same night: the one a strong, contented child, the other frail and querulous. Mary's motherly concern is for the weaker boy. She suckles him first, then, as she turns to the other, places the weakling in the manger where the stronger had been lying asleep. Thus when shepherds arrive to worship the child in the manger, hailing him as the Messiah, it is the weaker child they greet; and when wise men arrive from the east, bearing gifts, it is to him they are given. The strong one's given name is Jesus; Mary calls the weaker Christ. The two children, growing up, play collateral and conflicting parts, and live them out, it can be said, to the death and beyond.

The book's startling title is embossed in gilt capitals on its front cover. On the back cover appears, whether at the author's instruction or the publisher's initiative, the announcement, in capitals, 'this is a story', with prominent, isolating emphasis on the last word. This may look like a statement of the obvious. But *story* is a word charged with many associations. What is this, an old, old, story retold, a revision of history? Is it an argument nested in a narrative? Is it a 'story' as in the Daily Grail or the TV Muse, a report imaginatively enhanced? These and other things the story might be, given, nevertheless, what it principally is, a game deftly played by a writer taking pleasure in the cutting and shuffling of narrative devices. Those who have no relish for *wit*, in the eighteenth century sense, of 'creative intelligence' or 'playful dialectic', are unlikely to enjoy this book. Those who have that relish will find the book never less than entertaining, at times engrossing, only occasionally too smart for its sandals.

There is no conventional, chapter-drawn plot for easy summary or neat paraphrase. There is, rather, a patchwork of episodes presenting, on the one hand, the life and work of Jesus, man of the people, healer, radical thinker, preaching to Judea the coming of the Kingdom of God: and on the other, the nervous, watchkeeping presence of Christ, whose envy or admiration of his brother is tempered by misgivings at Jesus' rough contempt for the religious establishment (the Temple élite), and his love of the common folk. When Jesus goes into the wilderness to fast and pray, Christ seeks him out, begging him to change his crude political ways and join a community of like-minded people,

working for a better Judea under a conservative government. Won't you join us in our great work? he asks. Jesus is outraged, rejecting his brother vehemently as a 'phantom' whose proposals sound like 'the work of Satan'. Subsequently there is little or no direct contact between the brothers. Christ retreats from Jesus' view, but from this point on keeps meticulous note of Jesus' acts and sayings. Jesus speaks, Christ writes; his notebooks ('tablets') and scrolls play a significant part in the continuing story.

Enter now a new character, a stranger, to change the drive and purport of the narrative and bring the story beyond the McGuffin. He is an angel, the angel Gabriel, no less, 'sponsor' of the two boys at their birth, now disappointed in the one and ready to use the other in the adjustment of a cosmic error. Jesus has been preaching amiss, raising false expectations of a Kingdom on earth. It is time, the angel says to 'let truth into history', by displaying 'what ought to have been'. He has, in discourse, an almost comedic fluency in the skills of rhetoric and sophistry, in personal relations the smooth address of a kindly blackmailer, at need the vigour of a bully. In a series of encounters with Christ he persuades him of the necessity of betraying his brother. That good man must be left to die in despair, and buried in a tomb from which his body will be removed, by the stranger's contrivance. Christ will then begin to appear among the disciples, who will recognise him as the risen Lord, the Church's one foundation. It is not a role that Christ can wholly enjoy, haunted as he is by recollections of his part in a cruel deceit, but it is not one he can relinquish for as long as he lives, and he has a long life ahead of him.

The last narrative episode sees him living under another name in a town on the sea-coast, a place where Jesus had never been (it might well be Tarsus). He is now a married man, living as a netmaker and trying to forget about the stranger, who nevertheless arrives one night bearing a sackful of writings. They are Christ's own writings, tablets and scrolls. The stranger wants Christ to look through them and consider publishing an edited version. The true story of what ought to have happened needs to be written, to bring simple folk into the Church's net. Though Christ answers angrily, he is tempted: 'he couldn't help thinking about the story of Jesus, and how he could improve it.' He realizes that he has already begun a rewriting. When the stranger leaves, saying 'I shall not come to you again,' Christ hardly cares. 'How could I ever have thought that he was an angel? He has the look of a prosperous dealer in dried fruit or carpets. I don't want to see him again.' But the story of the life and death of Jesus still has to be re-told, 'to make it a better story'. This is a prospect he enjoys; once a writer, always a writer.

I cannot sufficiently praise Pullman's narrative style. It is the classic 'common style', with an edge, of irony, of ambivalence, of poetry; each episode falls into place, succinct, complete in itself, yet glancing to other episodes, before or after in the sequence. The longest episode comes as a surprise: it is Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in the hour before his arrest. He does not pray to God, 'take away this cup ... nevertheless thy will be done', and there is no angel, as in St. Luke's Gospel, at hand to strengthen him. His is a despairing outcry at the failure of God to be, intelligibly, God. In a world of much beauty, people suffer much and God is silent – because 'he's not bloody well there'. The writing is raw, passionate and compassionate, and might well be taken as an image of Mr. Pullman's own agnostic thought. His views of Church dogma and 'revealed religion' are known.

I do not think, however, that his book is to be taken as an onslaught on the faith or an assault on keepers of the faith or even an attack on preachers of the faith. These things the faithful can manage very well for themselves. No, give the book room to be what it justly claims: a good story, well told.

Walter Nash

Richard Holloway, *Between the Monster and the Saint: Reflections on the Human Condition*, Canongate Books, 2008, xx + 200pp., £14.99, 978 1 847 67253 7

In the summer of 1998, Richard Holloway, Bishop of Edinburgh and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, attended a Lambeth Conference, held in Canterbury on the campus of the University of Kent. The business in hand, he hoped, would be to 'craft a classic Anglican compromise' on some current theological and pastoral difficulties. Some discussions at the conference, however, proved to be rancorously uncompromising; there were episcopal conservatives determined that women and homosexuals should know their place (if any) in the Anglican Church, and others, liberals, pleading a reasoned and humane approach to these questions, and becoming angry in the process. Richard Holloway sided with the progressives, feeling, after their massive defeat in the vote on the 'sexuality' issue (by 526 to 70) a disappointment so keen as by and by to compel his renunciation of bishopric and primacy, and, indeed, membership of what I think he had begun to see as an all but suicidal Church.

His recollections of that Conference, and its consequences for his thinking, were subsequently recorded in a book published in 2001, entitled *Doubts and Loves; what is left of Christianity*. It is an engaging polemic, written with great warmth and conciliatory charm of address, making a powerful appeal to people he would now call 'weak believers' (this is a qualitative, not a pejorative term). After its appearance there were strict church folk ('strong believers') who were ready to dismiss its author as a renegade, or worse, an atheist. Reading the book on my first encounter with it, some years after its publication, I did not take that impression. It seemed to me that he might rather be called a heretic – one who makes a personal choice of what and how to believe – and heretics can be people of just the right sort, wrong only because they are in the minority.

The present book, with its *reflections on the human condition*, removes all doubt. Holloway is not a heretic; he is an atheist, with occasional yearnings for the good old credal days. His argument is existential: God is no longer here. Human beings are *here*, of the earth, earthy, responsible for their own monstrosities, beliefs, sorrows, consolations. Almighty God – our help in ages past, our hope for years to come – is neither *here* nor *there*, and there is little more to be said about that. On the other hand, religion persists, *here*, in its human affirmations and contradictions, its densities and rarities, its varieties of *usability*; and about that, Dr. Holloway has a great deal to say.

The book is structured ('structure', that useful key that opens the way in, and effectively locks the way out) in the form of three discourses, each related to the others by strands of cross-reference. The first section, entitled X-Force, treats of the human etiology of power, beginning in the primitive worship of stern,

incalculable gods, hardening into a raw institutionalized cruelty, bearing alike on man, woman, and beast, a force that treats people as *things*, a human misery relieved only by the interventions of human pity. (Saints begin here). The second section, called The Market Place, makes a survey of what is on offer for the 'buyer' shopping for some sense in what can be said about 'survival', 'soul' and 'suffering'. It evaluates responses to the problem of suffering, in 'strong' and 'weak' forms, first in what is left of Christianity, but then in stages of 'after-religion' (the term oddly evokes the post-modernism of art and literary theory). 'After-religion', in its weak form is placed on the third point of the evaluative cline. Holloway writes, 'People who are "after-religion" ... may even go to synagogue, church, or mosque – regularly or from time to time – because they want to stay in touch with one of the oldest and most enduring of human institutions'. (I stir uneasily at this, and murmur *touché*). The fourth position in the grading is strong 'after-religion', which means 'the complete absence of religious consciousness', defined in the words "Life is its own meaning. It just is. So get on with it." This is the posture of the sturdy and valiant atheist.

Thus far Holloway comes on like an old hand, a professional seasoned in the theology business. The business of art and the arts is another matter. There, he is a fascinated and grateful consumer, not a salesman of the product. He writes about it in the book's third and final section, entitled Play Time. This might mean, simply, time to play, like a child in the school yard; or something more, a time to relish the play of ideas in art; or more than that, a time to discover the incalculable play of the imagination revealed in poems, the drama, novels and other writings; or more yet, a time to recover from scriptural narratives their mythic power. Holloway reveres artists, not in themselves particularly – they can be, as persons, dull, uncouth, or outrageous – but for the gift that is in them. It is a gift of imagination that the artists themselves never quite understand, perhaps more than anything else, a way of *noticing* experience in its peripheral details, then asking *what if?*, and responding playfully with *as if*. The result is 'dis-closure', a throwing of new light on things previously stared at. Holloway is grateful for the arts and artists who have persuaded him to look again and see better. His reading is happily eclectic. I am reminded of what an Indian student, a Hindu, once taught me about the word *guru*: a guru, he said, is a person, or an animal, or an event, or an object, whence a lesson can be inferred. (So, in the tale of Bruce and the spider, the spider is *guru*.) Dr. Holloway's *gurus* are diverse; significantly, I think, many are, or are the creations of, women writers and thinkers.

As the book draws to its close the author recapitulates themes: the monster in humankind that lives next door to the saint; the pity for humankind that informs the saint; the unworldliness of the saint that nullifies the power of the monster. The last pages make a warm and wonderfully eloquent plea for 'a sane religion', governed by two commandments, the one a categorical imperative – you must never tolerate or collude in cruelty – the other a suggestion: be grateful for the revealed beauty of life. The rest is attitude. In its defiance of temporal authority, of empty display, of all the apparatus of control, the book has a Blakean lyricism, and though Holloway never mentions or quotes Blake, one isolated quatrain from that singular master's *Jerusalem* kept coming to me while I was reading:

THE GLASS

Each man is in his spectre's power
Until the arrival of that hour
When his humanity awake
And cast his spectre into the lake.

A spectre in Blake is a dead-eyed, mind-enclosing, rationalising, masculist principle; humanity can only awake in an 'emanation' of the spontaneous and feminine (not necessarily feminist), which gaily oversets the spectral rule. I find in this quatrain a pattern of the conversion that Richard Holloway has undergone. I refrain from further interpretation, but I do recall the report of a speech made by him at that fateful Conference in 1998, a speech in which he suggested that all the bishops' mitres should be collected and thrown into the Thames. Not a lake, exactly, but no doubt a good place to begin the drowning of a spectre.

Walter Nash

Barry Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion': T.S. Eliot and Christianity*, Lutterworth Press, 325 pp., £25, pb, 2010 978 0 718 83073 1

Always protective of his privacy, Eliot gave instructions that no one should be assisted who sought to write his biography. When he married, twice, the ceremonies had a minimal number of witnesses, and when he converted to Christianity he did so secretly. The doors of the church were locked at Finstock near Oxford, in June 1927 when Eliot, aged 38, was baptized. His first wife Vivien did not attend, and a verger was on guard in the vestry. His confirmation the following day was similarly *in camera*. But from now on, by Spurr's account, 'most of his writing – and, we can imagine, his spiritual life – is about the difficulty of attaining to worthiness for the beatific vision and, more positively, about the celebration of the rare intersections of the spiritual and the temporal'.

An unusually attentive reader might have noticed that the poet who two years previously had published *Poems 1909-1925*, had, in his 1920 poem 'Gerontion', borrowed from a sermon of the 17th century bishop Lancelot Andrewes:

Signs are taken for wonders. 'We would see a sign!'
The word within a word, unable to speak a word.

Eliot considered Andrewes to have been 'the first great preacher of the English Catholic Church', and when he published a volume of essays a year after his baptism on subjects as diverse as Machiavelli, Baudelaire, F. H. Bradley and Irving Babbitt he gave an essay on Andrewes pride of place, entitling the book *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order*.

'Journey of the Magi' was written for Faber's Ariel series of Christmas poems, and appeared two months after his baptism. Andrewes' words ('flashing phrases which never desert the memory' Eliot wrote) from a Nativity sermon of 1622 provide the first lines: 'A cold coming we had of it.' The poem moves from the birth which is incarnation to an oracular, wished-for death, hinting at the redemption yet to be enacted. In the Preface to *Lancelot Andrewes*, responding to a suggestion of his former Harvard teacher, Irving Babbitt, that he should 'come out into the open' Eliot roundly declared himself a 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion'.

'Journey of the Magi' is a Christian poem, though not necessarily an Anglo-Catholic one, whereas in *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) the signs are unmistakable. The figure of Mary, not always explicit and named only once, informs the whole poem, which has a peculiar strangeness. 'This is Marianism discerned in the midst of the Modernist project of thematic and technical renewal,' comments Spurr. The three white leopards are the world, the flesh and the devil. The greatest difficulty for the penitent pilgrim is sensuality, but the white 'Lady' (though blue is Mary's colour in the Anglo-Catholic liturgical scheme) represents virginity, purity. The poem's incantatory quality reflects the pilgrim journey, the way, ascent of the Dantean stair. Mary will intercede, and in that is hope of attaining beatitude. 'The effect of her prayer will be stupendous: it will eradicate the inheritance of Original Sin, "spitting from the mouth the withered apple seed".' But the poem does not bring closure. The penitent who has progressed through Lent to Good Friday does not reach the Resurrection.

In his 1933 Turnbull lectures at Cambridge, attended by, among others, James (Golden Bough) Frazer, A.E. Housman, G.E. Moore, I.A Richards, and F.R. Leavis, Eliot had emphasised that 'poetry is *incantation* as well as imagery'. In a high mass, such as that he had witnessed in the Madeleine in Paris, he could respond with fine aesthetic appreciation to the incantation, the drama, even the dance. 'Myth, ritual dance, the desire for an illiterate audience, even perhaps Anglo-Catholicism, are all aspects of a complex modern primitivism' Frank Kermode would later remark ('The Myth-Kitty' in *Puzzles and Epiphanies*, 1962). Dialogue in demotic London speech featured in *The Waste Land*, *Sweeney Agonistes* and *The Rock* which was performed in 1934 to support fundraising for London City churches, while incantation is a feature of the choruses. These bear contrasting witness to the poet's aspiration to 'the perfect order of speech, and the beauty of incantation'.

Murder in the Cathedral, commissioned by Bishop George Bell for the 1935 Canterbury Festival, was first performed in the cathedral where Becket was murdered in 1170. Its themes are psychological, spiritual, political, but as Spurr points out, Eliot 'applies Anglo-Catholic liturgical language to the pre-Anglican story'. He takes phrases from *The English Missal* (1912), but frequently with a conscious anachronism uses Cranmer's words, or the style of Lancelot Andrewes. Becket's Christmas Day homily refers to the mass as being 'to offer again to God His Body and Blood in Sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.' The phraseology is partly Cranmerian (although in the *Book of Common Prayer* where it occurs the emphasis falls on the singularity of Christ's sacrifice), but the Catholic doctrine runs contrary to the thirty-first of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles, which describes as 'blasphemous fables' the teaching that in the mass the priest offers Christ again in sacrifice. The incantation of the women of Canterbury ('Blessed Thomas, pray for us'), makes use of a form familiar in the Anglo-Catholic daily offices, petitioning the new saint to pray for them to God. Such prayers, based on the belief that the Virgin Mary and saints could be intermediaries between mankind and God, were specifically excluded by Cranmer and the Reformers.

The resonances of incantation would continue in Eliot's later work, in for instance, *Four Quartets* and *The Cocktail Party*. Meanwhile his new direction was to appear in his critical writings. Denis Donoghue comments in *Words Alone* that

'if he intended to assert the primacy of ethics he would have to approach the task directly and explicitly; he could not rely on poetry, even the poetry of "Ash-Wednesday" and the Ariel poems to do the job for him.' At home in America, Eliot's family's preoccupation had been, he once said, with right and wrong, but this he now put aside, with their Unitarianism, as inadequate. Eliot's new project was a promotion of something more than ethics, it extended beyond poetry to the wider culture, and it invoked a metaphysical sanction. In 1935 he declared in 'Religion and Literature' that his 'primary concern' was recognition of 'the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life', and urged that principles and beliefs that transcend those of this world should be applied in reading and criticism.

Spurr's book is comprehensively excellent on the nature and history of twentieth century Anglo-Catholicism, on Eliot's reputation as an Anglo-Catholic, his observance of its practices, his associations within Anglo-Catholic circles, and its expressions in his creative work, but has much less to say about the criticism. Yet Eliot, in the voice of one who knew he commanded influential and elite audiences was, after his conversion, campaigning for the values he associated with Christian and Catholic doctrine. An early attempt, which he soon came to recognise as unsuccessful, was the series of lectures delivered at the University of Virginia in 1933, *After Strange Gods*. It aimed, he said in a letter at the time, to show the lack of religious criteria in the criticism of modern literature, which was where his 'real interest had turned'. He discussed works by Katherine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Thomas Hardy and others, replacing a familiar dialectic of Classical vs. Romantic with Orthodox vs. Heretical. Blasphemy and the 'operations of the Evil Spirit' receive attention. 'No man was less a sensualist' than Lawrence, who was however 'spiritually sick'. It was a confusing message, and at the London obscenity trial in 1960 concerning *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Eliot offered to appear for the defence, eschewing, as he had with *Ulysses*, any censorship of literature.¹ Yet Eliot's campaign was no mere squib. As Ronald Schuchard points out in *Eliot's Dark Angel*, it was 'the first sustained attempt in English literature to construct a logical, dialectical, and categorical critical *system* for the moral valuation of "truth" and greatness in literature.'

A fellow member of St Stephen's Gloucester Road, Eliot's church in London, was Mary Trevelyan (1897-1983). She was awarded the OBE for her work for international students with the Student Christian Movement, and they had met in 1938 at a student conference at Swanwick, Derbyshire, where Eliot was invited to read *The Waste Land*. Spurr was permitted to see her diary and an important cache of one hundred and twelve letters written her by Eliot between 1940 and 1957. After his death she carefully prepared the letters for publication, but the project was vetoed by Eliot's widow, Valerie. Without quoting them Spurr is able to tell us what they reveal about Eliot's religious beliefs and observances. He tells her for example that the Assumption of Mary into heaven was to be understood as 'Our Lady by-passing Purgatory'. In Lent one year he told her he was giving up gin – except on Wednesdays. (In Lent 1928 he had taken a vow of celibacy, perhaps just for Lent.) Eliot attended auricular (private) confession of his sins about three

¹ I discussed the ambiguities of Eliot's offstage involvement with the Old Bailey trial in 'Knowing Good and Evil: T. S. Eliot and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, Heldref Publications, Washington DC., Vol 11 No 3, Summer 1998.

times a year. After confession came penance and absolution, a pattern to be found in Eliot's plays, though we may note that the grace of God's love was regarded as conditional upon the performance of these things, a belief that distinguishes it from the Pauline doctrine of personal faith in the all-sufficient cross.

Although he might go to confession to his parish priest, Eliot had his own confessor. The first of four was Francis Underhill, cousin of the author of *Mysticism* (1911), a book Eliot had read closely as a student at Harvard. Confessor figures appear in *The Family Reunion* (the G.P. Warburton), and notably in the gin-and-water drinking psychiatrist Harcourt-Reilly in *The Cocktail Party*. To efforts towards ecumenism, such as a controversial joint communion service in East Africa in 1913, and the churches of South India scheme after 1930, Eliot together with most Anglo-Catholics, was opposed. The integrity of the apostolic succession, which alone conferred legitimacy on celebrations of communion, was regarded as compromised. The South India scheme was 'a pantomime horse'. Ecumenical reunion for him could mean only reunification with Rome.

From 1958 to 1963, two years before his death, Eliot was a member of the Commission for the Revision of the Psalter. His contributions were of a minor kind, urging here and there the retention of a hallowed phrase. As Spurr says, 'the Modernist in poetry was a conservative'. Today's popular language, Eliot wrote in an article in *Theology* in 1949, is 'threadbare' and 'incapable of expressing exact and subtle thought'. Any new translation of the Bible should be for those capable of understanding, and it should not be made easy to understand. Latin was best for worship. In the *New English Bible* appearing from 1961, he noted 'frequent errors of taste', 'monotonous inferiority of phrasing', 'Boeotian absurdities', and 'verbal infelicities'. Another member of the Psalter Revision commission was C.S. Lewis, to whom he had been introduced by Charles Williams in 1945. Their first meeting started inauspiciously with Eliot telling Lewis, ten years his junior, that he looked older than appeared in his photos. Lewis had for years disliked Eliot's poetry and criticism ('a very great evil' he called it in a 1935 letter to Paul Elmer More), but somehow in the context of Psalter Revision Eliot must have won him over, since Lewis wrote afterwards that seeing him, he 'loved him'. In their exchanges of letters 'Dear Mr Eliot' became 'My dear Eliot'.

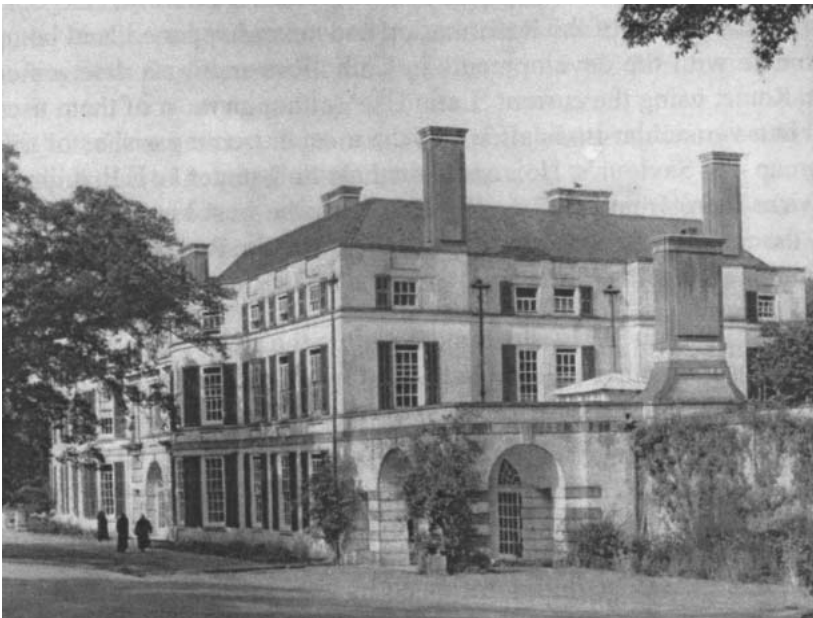
Spurr points out, largely on the basis of evidence from the correspondence with Mary Trevelyan, that Eliot's involvements with the discussions at St Anne's Soho, the *Christian News-Letter*, the Christian Frontier Council and the Moot are not to be read as indicating uncritical agreement with those projects. 'He was at one with them, theologically, insofar as they could be seen to be Catholic; but he was generally dissociated from their political leanings.' The Moot lacked focus, and the *Christian News-Letter* was 'nothing more than Panprotestantism rampant'. He wrote to Trevelyan in 1945 that social justice is the business of politicians, not of Christians; his book *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* was to 'blow up the Moot'.

Spurr's study elucidates the history of Anglo-Catholicism, its differences from Roman Catholicism and from Protestant traditions. After its heyday in the early 1930s it went into decline until now when, giving way largely to liberal theological thinking, it has 'virtually disappeared'. Doctrines such as that of the Apostolic Succession and trends such as the nineteenth century Catholic Revival, and the Tractarian or Oxford Movement are explained. High mass,

where the laity do not 'communicate', would have been a feature of St Stephen's, where Eric Cheetham, the incumbent until 1956, maintained the traditions Eliot esteemed. Anglo-Catholics held that there is a 'Real Presence' of Christ at the mass, regardless of the faith or lack of it of the participants. The elements really change, but metaphysically not materially. They are more real, or belong to a higher order of being, than human flesh and blood, as referred to in 'East Coker'. Bishop Jeremy Taylor (d. 1667, a figure whose writings Eliot admired) would attack Roman transubstantiation while espousing the Real Presence.

The marriage with Vivien was in crisis from its earliest days in 1915, and was an important factor in Eliot's search for the consolation he would find in Anglo-Catholic religion. Spurr reviews the evidence, arguing against an earlier view that Eliot was simply a sufferer from the numerous physical, mental and emotional troubles of Vivien, and the view that he was (as in *Tom and Viv*, the play and the film) indifferent to her very complicated anguish. The letters show they cared deeply for each other. But by 1933, despite their efforts, the marriage had passed breaking point, and in consultation with Vivien's brother Maurice, Eliot arranged a separation. Eliot's letter to Bertrand Russell thanking him with unusual effusiveness ('Vivien says you have been an angel to her') for taking Vivien to Torquay in January 1916, six months after they married, for what could easily have been taken as an amorous episode remains puzzling. Eliot seems glad of the therapeutic effect on Vivien of the romantic weekend, even though to all appearances he had been cuckolded.

Eliot wrote in 1952 to W. T. Levy, an American priest with whom he was friendly, that he intended to live out the last years of his life in the Anglican Benedictine community at Nashdom Abbey, Taplow. Because he was a priest, Levy would be permitted to come and stay. But a few years after Vivien's death Eliot's eye was caught by his secretary, Valerie, aged thirty to his sixty-nine when they were married in 1957. They lived happily thereafter, albeit for only the remaining eight years of his life.



Nashdom Abbey is now converted to flats

There are appendices on the unpublished letters and diary of Mary Trevelyan and of George Every of the Anglican community at Kelham in Nottinghamshire. Every later went over to the Roman Church. A short appendix discusses Eliot and C. S. Lewis, while the fourth gives nine pages to 'T. S. Eliot and Anti-Semitism'. 'I am not an anti-Semite,' Eliot remarked in 1956. 'In the eyes of the Church to be an anti-Semite is a sin.' Spurr engages with Anthony Julius' immoderate attack in *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* (1995). Julius argues that Eliot's work, by contributing to anti-Semitism, was one of the causes of the Holocaust. 'To single Eliot out for such a savage indictment is a prejudice in itself.' And 'to argue that the passing reference to the Jew in "Gerontion" degrades Jews, is as compelling as to argue that Milton's *Paradise of Fools* degrades Catholics or that Eliot's "Sweeney" poems insult the Irish.'

Roger Kojecký

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine 18), Cambridge University Press, 2010, xix + 539pp., £75.00 / US\$125, 978 0 5214 7012 4

The Christian tradition, all the way back to the Bible, has affirmed that God speaks. But what does this mean? Kevin Vanhoozer's latest heavyweight tome tackles the question head-on, and proposes that by conceptualising God as a God of communicative action, we might take seriously the Biblical language of God's speaking. Long-time readers of Vanhoozer will find many of his familiar themes here, to do with communicative agency, the dramatic shape of scriptural narrative and the life it underwrites, and the importance of scripture itself as 'first theology'. Readers of *The Glass* may recall the 2000 issue containing articles both by and about Vanhoozer. Those anticipating a theological-hermeneutical workout with breadth and depth will not be disappointed.

Vanhoozer defines the key concept of this book as follows: 'Remythologizing means taking seriously Biblical texts that ascribe communicative actions and intentions to God.' It is all very well to say that God speaks 'in Christ', but for Vanhoozer it is necessary also to affirm that 'without Israel's Scripture we would lack the right interpretative framework with which to understand the event of Jesus Christ.' Hence, this approach is *canonical* in addition to being Christological. The heart of the remythologising project is that it 'proceeds from the Biblical accounts of divine communicative action to ontology rather than vice versa.'

The book has nine chapters, in three 'movements', with – let it be said immediately – an enviable ability to combine single-minded focus on the goal with comprehensive reference to all manner of competing and contrasting proposals. *Remythologizing Theology* is a tour-de-force which settles for nothing less than a 'retooling of classical Christian orthodoxy' to meet the challenges of alternative proposals about the nature of God. At the heart of this topic lies the challenge to classical theism's view of the impassibility of God, a challenge overwhelmingly driven by reflection on the problem of evil and the extreme forms that problem has taken in the twentieth century. In effect, Vanhoozer wants to say that we have thrown over too quickly the traditional view, under the mistaken impression that it represented a failure to reckon with evil. The simplest path taken has been to say instead that God must suffer, and be open to the awful possibility that

his creation will go in evil directions, with either the inability or perhaps the unwillingness to hold it to the path of truth and goodness. In short: God must be neither omnipotent nor unchanging if evil is to be taken seriously. To which Vanhoozer's response is: by no means! How does the argument proceed?

An introduction frames the project in terms of the question, 'What must God be like in order to do what the Bible depicts him as doing with words: creating, commanding, promising, consoling?' The remythologising project is set forth as an alternative to the most prominent modern options: whether they be in terms of Bultmann's demythologising which translates the Biblical language into existential categories, or the more thorough-going 'projectionism' of Feuerbach where theology is construed as anthropology. To remythologise is to let scripture set the terms of enquiry.

Part I of the book then explores "'God" in Scripture and theology'. Chapter 1, 'Biblical representation', begins with a review of Biblical passages where the speaking God is central to the text, including such expected examples as Genesis 1, Exodus 3:13-15 and 33-34 (esp. 34:5-7), Hebrews 1, and John 1 as well as several others. This chapter also surveys some theological issues thereby raised: if God cannot speak then the standard Christian understanding of God must be revised. Further, *pace* most philosophers of religion, since speech is an action, it is unclear why a God who acts could not speak. Vanhoozer also identifies one key issue for his account: 'the ascription of feelings or emotions, a mixture of activity and passivity, to God'. Chapters 2 and 3 engage in hand-to-hand communicative combat with alternative theological models currently (or recently) in favour: in particular 'open theism' ('God's love necessitates self-limitation'); panentheism (the view that the world is 'in' ['*-en-*'] God, 'affirming the interdependence of God and world'; and what Vanhoozer dubs 'the new kenotic-perichoretic relational ontotheology', which so emphasises relationality in the godhead that it risks losing sight of the persons who are the beings in the relationships.

Part II of the book then sets out the positive thesis, under the heading 'Communicative theism and the triune God'. Chapter 4, 'God's being is in communicating', is the heart of the argument, and I have cited from it above. To remythologise is to rediscover the triune communicative God at the heart of the Biblical narrative. Chapter 5 fills out the thesis with respect to participation in this God: Vanhoozer says that the main claim of his book is that 'participating in God means participating in his triune being-in-communicative-activity'. In this chapter he offers a simple schema for what the triune God is in the business of communicating: light, life, and love, since God is light, God is life, and God is love. Human vocation is thus understood in terms of participation in the Word of God (light), the Spirit of God (life), and 'the fellowship of Father and Son in the Spirit' (love).

Part III, 'God and World: authorial action and interaction', takes up the now-proposed model to explore various questions of divine action in the world, across a range of theological topics: divine sovereignty in the face of evil (Ch. 7), divine suffering, especially in the cross, which brings Vanhoozer to the direct consideration of divine impassibility in the passion (Ch. 8), and the right way to describe divine compassion in general: what it means, in other words, that God is love (Ch. 9). Perhaps of most interest in this section, however, is Chapter 6, which sets up the discussions to follow by mapping a new way of conceiving

of divine interaction with the world in general. This is a fascinating account, focused around the notion of God as author in a Bakhtinian, dialogical sense. In particular: 'God completes or consummates the unfinished person-idea that is Abraham, Moses, David, etc., through an active dialogical penetration into the depths of their being.' Divine action in and through human persons, therefore, is conceptualised subtly in terms of human freedom to participate in the divinely authored dialogue. In Vanhoozer's terms: 'God's dialogical authorship, though in asymmetrical relation to its hero-interlocutors, is an entirely appropriate way of engaging human persons according to their rational, volitional, and emotional natures'. Self-determination is re-described in this model as the freedom (on the part of the character) to enter the 'potentially infinite dialogue with the Author God' – everything hangs on the point that the kind of predetermination (or classically, 'predestination') in view is dialogically constituted. 'Genuine Christian freedom,' says Vanhoozer, is 'the freedom to say "Yes" to the divine call.' There is never going to be an easy way to articulate divine action alongside human action, but in Bakhtin's ability to characterise Authorship above and beyond the realm of monological discourse Vanhoozer offers as patient and sophisticated an account as one might hope for.

What sort of dialogue might a reader of *Remythologizing Theology* enter into with its author? One might contest the central claim that God is a God of communicative action, but here Vanhoozer seems on solid ground. Speech is a form of action, and if one is to take scripture seriously it is indeed difficult to see why a God who acts should not also be a God who speaks. 'Speaking' may need to be understood differently, to anticipate a key point, but this has certainly been an option available to the theologian for some time, notably in Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse*. Slightly less persuasive, at least to my mind, was Vanhoozer's claim that divine speech is the necessary clarification of what otherwise ambiguous divine action is about: 'Without an event of divine speaking, we are unable to say either *who* is acting or *what* this person is up to.' Broadly speaking that is a helpful point, but it cannot be a rule or requirement. Many kinds of actions are unambiguous (recall that it was the recognition of genuine non-verbal communication that, in part, reorientated much of Wittgenstein's later work) and many kinds of speech act are ambiguous, some even by design, possibly including divine ones (e.g. Joshua 5:14?). To describe God as communicative, and to insist that this is in and through words such as we find in the canon, need not entail the further claim that this is because only so could God communicate successfully.

More broadly, the substantive theological claims concerning a Jesus who endures suffering but thereby demonstrates divine impassibility seem likely to provoke considerably more discussion. Vanhoozer himself recognises the 'counter-intuitive nature of this claim', and while it does indeed offer a striking set of proposals for conceptualising divine action, my own response relates more to whether it passes Vanhoozer's own 'remythologising' test: is this in fact the way that the Biblical *mythos* intends us to take language of divine emotion and/or suffering? Maybe so, but I suspect that more would need to be done with regard to this trope to demonstrate that such a reading is in fact 'with the grain', as literary theorists like to say.

Overall, however, *Remythologizing Theology* is a significant achievement. It

should sound a call to Biblical scholars to raise their game with respect to the categories of theological thought which they deploy in their own interpretations. And more generally, it offers vision and energy for the forbidding task of thinking rightly about who God is as a communicative deity deeply involved in the life of the created world, a world he has, in the Bakhtinian sense, ‘authored’.

Richard S. Briggs

***The Sidney Psalter: The Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney*, eds. Hannibal Hamlin, Michael G. Brennan, Margaret P. Hannay, and Noel Kinnamon, Oxford World’s Classics, OUP, 2009, xliii + 338pp., £9.99 pb. 978 0 19 92 1793 9**

The Sidney Psalter, an edition of English psalm paraphrases by Sir Philip Sidney and his younger sister, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, was first published in the nineteenth century by the Chiswick Press. Selected psalms also appeared in collections and anthologies of English verse, such as John Ruskin’s *Rock Honeycomb* (1877). This belated print life was preceded, however, by extensive manuscript circulation throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a circulation initially confined to a privileged literary coterie largely consisting of close acquaintances of the Sidney family, particularly of Mary, including Sir John Harington, Sir Walter Aston, Lady Mary Wroth, George Herbert, Samuel Daniel, and John Donne, whose celebration of the Psalter – ‘Upon the Translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countess of Pembroke his Sister’ – is well known. Whilst it is not known to have circulated with the Psalter manuscript, Donne’s poem is the first presented of the prefatory material in this excellent new edition, and neatly sets the tone for appreciating this early modern text’s literary creativity and innovation blended with its Biblical source.



The Sidney Psalter
The Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney



Sir Philip Sidney composed the first forty-three psalms of the Psalter, possibly as ‘a practical accompaniment to his *Defence of Poetry*’, but after his death in 1586, Mary, younger by seven years, completed the task, translating Psalms 44-150, and revising Philip’s compositions. Translation of the Psalms was not an unusual exercise in the sixteenth century, but the resulting Psalter was the first of its kind; it was arguably the most original translation, artfully creating unique English poetry from the Biblical Psalms, with each one presented in a new or different stanza form.

Among many psalmic influences in several languages, the Sidneys drew on Coverdale’s 1539 Great Bible (especially the prose translations of the Psalms in its appended Book of Common Prayer) and the Geneva Bible (and its extensive marginal notes) as the primary English source texts for their translation. Their accomplishment was a major achievement in English literary history, and one worthy of artistic recognition beyond the limited critical praise sometimes given to translations. Donne famously stated that the Sidney *Psalms* achieved the ‘highest matter in the noblest form’ and yet, as the editors discuss in this edition’s illuminating and highly readable introduction, he also recognized harmony as an apposite metaphor to describe the role of creativity in the relationship these writers had

with their source text and their translation: 'A brother and a sister, made by thee / The organ, where thou art the harmony.' Thus, we are told, 'the strongest voices we hear are those of the Sidneys, since they chose the specific English words, decided on their particular order, the arrangement of their sounds and shapes, and elaborated the figurative language of the originals.'

Such high literary value is richly articulated in this modernized edition, with helpful discussion of the literary traditions and metrical forms of the psalms, the courtly and religious contexts of the Sidneys, and a concise yet very helpful fifty pages with explanatory notes to accompany each psalm. The detail illuminates factual and stylistic glosses on words and phrases, is informative on Biblical (Geneva) sources and influences, and draws comparisons with other early modern poets and their works, including other contemporary Psalm paraphrases. A brief but fascinating discussion of the *Psalms's* modern critical reception also includes the important recognition only relatively recently accorded to Mary Sidney Herbert as the principal author and editor of the work. She is described as Philip's 'intellectual and kindred spirit', with a marked influence on later women writers. A select bibliography indicates the recent surge of critical interest in the authorship and literary quality of the Sidney Psalter, and will be helpful to any reader interested in pursuing this fascinating and incredibly important literary, and devotional, collaborative project.

Johanna Harris

Jerry Root, *C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An investigation of a pervasive theme*, James Clarke & Co, 2010, xxii + 271pp, £22.50 / \$47.50, 9 780 2271 7338 1

Did St Paul say that 'the love of money is *the* root of all evil' – in which case, what about pride and disobedience – or '*a* root of all evil'? A similar sort of ambiguity hangs about the title of this work and its subtitle: *An investigation of a pervasive theme*. To my mind, a simple *C S Lewis and Subjectivism* would have been much clearer and more accurate; for subjectivism, which locates value entirely in the mind, is what this book is about.

In the *Preface*, Root cites Richard Weaver, the Chicago University rhetorician and anti-Nominalist, as the benchmark by which Lewis will be assessed. The effect of this – although illuminating about Weaver – is rather to recast Lewis as a British Weaver. Since Weaver deplored the barbarism in American society arising from the overthrow of objective truth, it is fair to say that for him subjectivism *was* the great evil of the modern world. Root does concede that for Lewis pride is 'the great sin'. Despite this, he then proceeds as if it is subjectivism, and moulds Lewis's views to align with those of Weaver.

That Lewis was hostile to subjectivism is not in doubt. Root deals effectively with Lewis's treatment of the topic in 'The Poison of Subjectivism' and *The Abolition of Man*. It is a shame, though, that two of Lewis's most pithy comments on the problems arising from the subjectivist view – 'it is as if we took out our eyes to look at them', and 'unless the measuring rod is independent of the things measured, we can do no measuring' – are passed over without comment. Root has discovered a more solemn Lewis than the one I found when reading the same works.

With *The Problem of Pain*, Root is much less at ease, for the subject matter does not really fit into his scheme of things. Root finds the weakest section of the book to be the chapter on animal pain, and it is his perception that Lewis here himself becomes subjectivist. Interestingly, this was also the chapter particularly praised (with reservations) by C. E. M. Joad, leading to a robust exchange of views on the topic between Joad and Lewis. Root completely fails to mention this, perhaps because it does not support his argument.

A similar sort of tension arises with Root's consideration of *The Magician's Nephew*, and his determination to make it primarily subjectivist in theme. I'm with the other sources Root cites, who see it as about power, utility etc. The Weaver framework here has become a bit of a Procrustean bed. It would be simpler, and truer, to say that although Lewis saw evil in subjectivism, he saw it in a lot of other things as well.

The strength of Root's book, it seems to me, is its comprehensiveness. Root ranges widely over the Lewis oeuvre, and encompasses not only Lewis's apologetic works but also his literary criticism, his poetry and his fiction, showing the case against subjectivism that Lewis makes in all these areas.

Aware that there is a tendency, particularly in America, for undue adulation in regard to Lewis, Root confesses at the end of the book that part of his purpose has been to read Lewis more critically; and there is, indeed, a sense throughout of Root playing the role of a somewhat reluctant devil's advocate. In the first chapter Root refers to Lewis's weakness of argument without specifying the actual nature of that weakness. Later, he does back up perceived flaws with evidence; for example, that Lewis misunderstood what Tillyard meant by 'vague'. Where he feels Lewis has been unfairly treated, Root is sound in defence. He makes a good, well-researched case against the contention that the Anscombe incident was what prompted Narnia.

Root's assumption with regard to audience seems to be that the reader will be unfamiliar with the texts concerned, for there is more by way of explanation than explication. Thus although this book will offer little that is new – except about Weaver – to a reader already familiar with Lewis's work, in its thoroughness it will be illuminating for those to whom Lewis is new territory.

In his conclusion Root writes, 'Lewis's skill has made me wish I could simply say to readers, "Oh, but you should read him for yourself!"' Quite so. This work is no substitute for Lewis himself, but if it leads readers on to the original then it will have performed a worthwhile task.

Barry Livingstone

David C. Mahan, *An Unexpected Light: Theology and Witness in the Poetry and Thought of Charles Williams, Micheal O'Siadhail and Geoffrey Hill*, James Clarke & Co, 2010, xvi + 230 pp., £19.50, 978 0 227 17336 7

David Mahan makes a plea for 'a missiology of the imagination' (the closing words of this book), a call to consider again what poetry has to offer the Church as it faces the task of connecting with sceptical late modern society. Mahan argues that the Church, in responding to a perceived 'credibility crisis', in attempting to

inculcate degrees of 'resonance' and 'recognition' which will give contemporary society cause to think again, should consider afresh poetry's potential to revitalize 'the language of faith in ways that are at once faithful and compelling', to shine 'an unexpected light' (the phrase is taken from Bonhoeffer). George Herbert, in 'The Church-porch', urged his readers to 'hearken unto a Verser, who may chance/ Ryme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure', since 'A verse may finde him, who a sermon flies'. While Mahan would surely approve of Herbert's lines, they do not convey the scope or the ambition or the complexity of his exercise in academic theology, originally composed as a doctoral thesis at Cambridge under the supervision of Ben Quash, who provides a foreword to this book

The study takes as its core texts the Arthurian poems of Charles Williams, *Taliessin through Logres* (1938) and *The Region of the Summer Stars* (1944); the Irish poet Micheal O'Siadhail's volume of 'poems in witness to the holocaust' *The Gossamer Wall* (2002) and Geoffrey Hill's *The Triumph of Love* (1998). The criteria given for selection are aesthetic excellence, a willingness to respond to the modernist condition from a Christian perspective, and also evidence of an acknowledgement of modernity's traumatic impact on Christian confidence leading to a capacity to 'provide examples of how to address late-modern people specifically in a compelling manner'. Given the poets chosen, or two of them at least, we gather that ease of access was not considered essential. The poets are provided with 'conversation partners' in order to complement and augment the insights gained by close reading of the texts. Janet Soskice's work on metaphor is aptly and adeptly introduced into the discussion of Charles Williams's imagery; parallels are revealed between O'Siadhail and Paul Ricoeur's treatment of testimony; illuminating affinities between Geoffrey Hill and the moral philosophy of D. M. MacKinnon are also explored. Mahan (unsurprisingly so in this case) is an author-friendly reader and interpreter, willing to be guided and prompted by what the three poets have to say about their craft and vision. Not that he is a passive expositor; his close readings of the texts are imaginative, rigorous and compelling. He seeks to convince us that these poems do more than convey Christian truths embellished by selected poetic devices. They speak not only through their subject matter but through their form; an example would be O'Siadhail's use of chiasmus; it echoes a familiar Biblical convention, it is put to specific stylistic use in providing unity and intensity of focus, but it also allows the poet to convey his ethical concerns by rendering 'the voice of the other in such a way that the other is not displaced' and to support 'a diversity of voices and experiences without loss to their particular, and personal, character'. The need to garner evidence to underpin a thesis could lead to contrived and manufactured readings; Mahan however comes across as a reader of scrupulous integrity, and only very occasionally did I find myself wondering whether the focused stylistic cohesion attributed to some sections (subtle rhyming patterns and alliteration for instance) was not a little forced.

Mahan argues that Biblical themes are reinscribed in these poems; new possibilities of vision and recognition are produced. (Faith dominantly in Williams' imagistic poetry, hope in *The Gossamer Wall*, love in *The Triumph of Love*.) They display a model accuracy which the Church should aspire to. They can form a 'prediscourse' suited to the targeted late modern audience which is so unresponsive to the gospel message, and their use of 'calculated restraint'

whereby meaning emerges as a possibility is to be admired and emulated. In developing the argument that these poems provide a model for Christian theology and mission Mahan maintains that these poems remind us that we must speak 'Christianly' whether in theology or in mission; how we say things should be consistent with what we have to say. These poems supply us with 'pedagogies of persuasion'.

An Unexpected Light comes highly commended by prominent scholars in the literature and theology field (David F. Ford, Jeremy Begbie, Peter Hawkins). I read this book as an evangelical Christian in the (Welsh) experiential Calvinist tradition who is a teacher and critic of literature, but not an academic theologian. I was aware of how readers of broadly similar persuasions to mine would be likely to react to aspects of David Mahan's project. Some would see his analysis of the state of things as being dismally defeatist and circumscribed by his exclusive focus on the Anglo-American scene; they might feel that he shows late modernity too much respect and would want to remind him that great spiritual truths are hidden from the wise and intelligent and revealed to babes. His remedies would be judged as being timid and marginal rather than nuanced and subtle. They might even be impertinent enough to suggest that the author apply the kenotic principle central to the chapter on Geoffrey Hill to his own style, so that he might not consider the sublime academic tone as something to be grasped. They would react with bemused incredulity to the suggestion that the poetry of Geoffrey Hill could be used as a pre-evangelistic aid, however indirectly. While not able to disown these predictable responses, I became increasingly unwilling to retreat in their direction the more I grappled with this intense study. And more so when I placed *An Unexpected Light* in the context of its author's role as President of the Rivendell Institute at Yale (www.rivendellinstitute.org) and of the work undertaken there. But whether or not we are convinced as well as entertained and exhorted by the arguments presented by David Mahan, we have cause to celebrate the remarkable explicatory gifts on display here, and to thank the author for inspiring us to discover or to appreciate anew three poets of rare significance.

Robert Rhys

Christopher Bush, *Ideographic Modernism: China, Writing, Media*, OUP USA, 2010, 202pp., £32.50, 978 0 19 539382 8

This book begins three times, since there is a Prologue and an Introduction before the book proper. The Prologue, and thus the whole book, begins (after a couple of epigraphs from Barthes and Benjamin) by quoting a celebrated paragraph from Kafka, about China, or 'China' (a fundamental distinction in Bush's book). It describes a messenger from the Emperor, who is on a never-to-be-completed journey to 'you', the reader. If this message were ever to reach the intended recipient the Emperor would have been long dead, and the message redundant. It is a typically Kafkaesque scenario (the bureaucracy, the never-ending complexity of bewildering obstacles to 'getting through', the final hopelessness and pointlessness of ever doing so), but one which also conforms to or expresses some of the stereotypes long applied to China in the West (likewise the bureaucracy – or *mandarinism* – the despotic empire, the mystery).

In fact there have been Christian missionaries to China who did not find it impossible to know China: Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary in the eighteenth century to the court of Wanli dressed as a Chinese, spent ten years learning the language before writing books in it, and earned the praise of his Chinese fellow-scholars who said that he understood traditional Chinese culture better than they. Presumably his conception of Chinese written characters was superior by far to that of any of the modernists Bush discusses (he does mention Ricci briefly). Another book, *Faith of our Fathers*, is a revealing discussion of Chinese traditional culture, from the point of view of a Chinese Christian, and includes a fascinating section on Ricci.¹

Bush's book ends with a reference back to the same story by Kafka, the story of a journey that never ends, a the message that is never delivered, for

The dream 'you' dream in Kafka's parable is that the Imperial Messenger is still – 'even now' or 'always still' – fighting his way through the inner chamber of the imperial palace. In reality the news is not that China is 'now' in the world. The news is that it always has been and that 'we' have known this for a very long time and that the forms of knowing and unknowing in which we have simultaneously acknowledged and denied this fact ... are increasingly unequal to the task of defining 'us'. The wish that this dream fulfills is that China has not yet arrived. That is the message that is always still on its way to 'you', even now (p 149).

In other words, 'the medium is the message', and towards the end of his book Bush quotes from and discusses Marshall McLuhan's literary theory. Bush explores Kafka's biographical connections with China, as well as the uses to which he puts his 'imaginary' of 'China', and its relation to other historical imaginaries of China in the West – as he does with each of the modernist writers he discusses.

In between these 'framing' references to Kafka, Bush takes us through extremely interesting, often brilliant analyses of some writings by such modernists as Pound, Mallarmé, Claudel, Victor Segalen (a French poet living in China who published privately a volume of prose poems *Stèles* in 1912), Benjamin, Valéry – not to mention philosophers and theorists from Plato to Heidegger and Derrida.

The Introduction, after a quote from Hegel, begins with the bold statement that the ideograph, far from being an ancient, Chinese form of writing as people suppose, is 'a modern western invention'. It is indeed modernism's idea of China and of Chinese writing that Bush is concerned with.

After the Prologue and Introduction, the first chapter of the book proper begins with a discussion of Ezra Pound, focusing especially on 'In a Station of the Metro':

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound, the modernist most famously associated with Chinese writing, who died in 1972 aged eighty-seven, was by the 1950s making serious efforts to learn the language, both spoken and written, with the help of Chinese friends who themselves were scholars. Pound had consulted with Chinese friends from the beginning, when he was writing 'Cathay' (an alternative name for China). So,

¹ Chan Kei Thong, *Faith of our Fathers*, China Publishing Group Orient, 2005.

although when he wrote that poem he could not read Chinese and relied on Fenellosa's (unreliable) glossary, it is clear that his engagement with Chinese was a serious, lifelong business. A recent book comprises letters to and from Pound's Chinese friends, and with interesting introductions has been published recently by OUP.¹

Bush's concern is with the modernists' references to and citations of China, or more especially 'China' – their 'imaginary' of China, (which does not mean that their 'China' was merely imaginary, as he points out), and in particular of Chinese characters, the 'ideographs' of the title. He is not concerned with what Chinese characters *are* (a difficult, contested question), but with what they mean to the West, and specifically with what they, and 'China', meant to the modernists. The present reader found the book stimulated him to want to understand Chinese writing itself better, not just modernism.

One thinks of McLuhan, reading that

The ideograph is ... a figure of mediation.... Historically, then, the ideograph was intimately connected with the question of media.

Bush affirms that he will build the case for this connection throughout the book, and indeed he does. The 'China' of modernist writers had an intimate connection with their idea of and response to technology, for which China and its writing even became a sort of complex figure. Bush shows that China, or rather 'China', has been intimately concerned with Western modernism's critique, interpretation and analysis of the West – almost as if 'China' were a literary / cultural theory in itself. He ties this to the modernist obsession with 'media' (the technological media of phonography and photography as well as the medium of language), as well as to its obsession with primitivism, of recovering a kind of innocence, or, naive eye supposedly uncorrupted, unsophisticated.

Bush writes that 'the ideograph ... figures ... language approaching the condition of photography.' He explains, a page later:

The photograph and ideograph are equally unconcerned with the continued reality of either what they show or what looks at them. Like the photograph, the ideograph renders not an instant of consciousness but an instant rather than consciousness. It is in this sense, I have been arguing, that the ideograph figures language approaching the condition of photography. (p 58)

As Gertrude Stein said delightfully (quoted by Bush): 'In China there is no need of China, because in China china is china.' This focuses our minds on the difference between China and 'China', as well as on the porcelain (another medium, of course) which for the West represents 'China', to the extent that it is the original source of china. In the West, china (porcelain) is part of our 'imaginary' of China. Bush:

for modernism, the ideograph figured not simply a different writing system, but a point of entry into a radically other worldview. As Pound would later write: "'The ideograph is a door into a different modality of thought.'" (p 15)

¹ Zhaoming Qian (ed.), *Ezra Pound's Chinese Friends*, OUP, 2008.

Bush asks:

How did an emblem of cultural stagnation become a model of literary modernity?
(p 32)

He writes:

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Chinese came more and more to be understood as a historically and conceptually primitive language, with the key piece of evidence being the cumbersome writing system that was said to bind the Chinese to the sensuous particular and to hinder the development of abstract and individual – let alone modern – thought. (p 18)

This perhaps imperialist view gave way; as Bush writes:

The topos of Oriental writing (both the ideograph and the hieroglyph) would help formulate many of the central concepts of modernity: the commodity (Marx), the dream (Freud), the cinematic and poetic image (Eisenstein, Pound), the allegorical sign (Benjamin), theatrical gesture (Mallarmé, Artaud), and the enigmatic and ideological character of modern experience (Kracauer, Adorno), to cite some of the most prominent examples (p 19).

The section on Claudel is fascinating. Bush takes his approach to the ideograph as a 're-reading' of the Poundian tradition. He tells us that Claudel (with his example of the character for 'eternity') 'presents Chinese writing as the transformation of transitory phenomena into signs of eternity'. He calls Claudel's 'the religion of the sign', and contrasts him with Pound, saying that 'while the complexities of Imagist poetics emerge from its approach to the instant, those of Claudel emerge from its relationship to the eternal.' Thus Bush points to the two streams of modernism: Imagism, represented especially by Pound, and the Symbolism of Mallarmé and Claudel (and probably Stevens), which are parallel responses.

Bush implies that Claudel identified the East, spiritually, with Buddhism, and Bush himself seems to do so. Yet both Taoism and Confucianism are more indigenous to China than is Buddhism, and Chen Kai Thong would have them quite arguably compatible with the Bible, with Christianity. Bush says that for Claudel, what China needed was 'salvation'. He discusses the Chinese character represented by 'Shi' (complete). This character is '+', which is, 'pictographically' or at least pictorially, a cross. To read this as *the* Cross (of Christ) as Claudel apparently did, need not be considered tendentious, as Bush seems to think – at least not for a Christian, which Claudel was. Bush calls Claudel's interpretation (or, spiritualization) an 'emptying out of conventional meaning'; but surely, since the conventional meaning of '+' includes 'complete, perfect', Claudel is simply actually reading in his own supplementary Christian meaning reference to 'Christ.' This book is a brilliant contribution to our understanding of modernism, especially in its relation to China.

Bill Goldman

Chinese Art

You said you did not care for Chinese art
Because you could not tell what dynasties
A scroll or bowl came from. 'There is no heart'
'Where time's avoided consciously.'

I saw your point because I loved you then.
The willows and the horses and the birds
Seemed cold to me; each skilfully laid-on, thin
Phrase spoke like nothing but unpassionate words.

I understand now what those artists meant;
They did not care for style at all, or fashion.
It was eternity they tried to paint,
And timelessness, they thought, must lack all passion.

Odd that just when my feeling need for you
Has gone all wrong, I should discover this.
Yes, but I lack the sense of what is true
Within these wise old artists' skilfulness.

It would be easy now to close again
My heart against such hurt. Those willows show,
In one quick stroke, a lover feeling pain,
And birds escape fast as the brush-strokes go.

Elizabeth Jennings, from The Mind has Mountains, 1966.

永恒

Yong heng, 'Eternity'.

十全十美

Shi quan shi mei, 'Perfect in every way'.
(Simplified Chinese.)

Notes on Contributors

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Valentine Cunningham is Professor of English Language and Literature at Oxford University and Fellow and Tutor in English Literature at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He specializes in modern literature and literary theory, and he has twice been a judge for the Booker Prize. His books include *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (1975), *British Writers of the Thirties* (1988), *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts and History* (1994) and *Reading After Theory* (2002).

Having obtained his PhD from Kings College London in 2005, **Dr Bill Goldman** took up an offer to teach in universities in China, staying for three years. Living now in Richmond and tutoring privately, he is working on the book of his doctoral thesis, to be entitled *Prophetic History: Blake, Browning & the Visionary Tradition*.

Dr Johanna Harris is Lecturer in Renaissance Literature at the University of Exeter. She is co-editor (with Elizabeth Scott-Baumann) of *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Women, 1558-1680* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), and has published articles in *The Seventeenth Century*, *Literature Compass*, and forthcoming in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of English Renaissance Literature*. She is editing the manuscript writings of Lady Brilliana Harley, and is working on a monograph on puritan epistolary communities.

Dr Sharon Jebb is a free-lance lecturer in literature and theology, and spiritual theology. She is currently teaching at the University of Aberdeen, and at Union Theological College, Belfast. She studied English at undergraduate level at Queen's University, Belfast, and Theology at Master's level at Regent College, Vancouver. Her doctorate, from the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts, University of St Andrews, will be published in spring 2011 by Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock, entitled *Writing God and the Self: Samuel Beckett and C.S. Lewis*.

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

Barry Livingstone grew up in Africa, before moving to Britain for postgraduate work as a Commonwealth Scholar. At the time of his retirement from secondary teaching, he was Head of English at Bishop Ramsey Church of England School,

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Walter Nash is Emeritus Professor of Modern English Language at Nottingham University. He has authored several collections of poems, including *Memorabilia*, and *Recent Intelligence*. He is also the author of numerous books and articles on language and rhetoric. He lives now on the island of Tenerife.

Cedric Porter was arts and entertainments editor of the South London Press for over thirty years and is currently working on a play to mark the thousandth anniversary of the martyrdom of Archbishop Alfege in 1212.

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Robert Rhys is Reader in Welsh Literature at Swansea University. He is the author of a Welsh-language critical biography of the nineteenth century novelist Daniel Owen, and has contributed entries on Owen to the *Dictionary of National Biography* and other reference works. He is currently working on a biography of the writer and political activist D. J. Williams. He was the editor of the Evangelical Movement of Wales's Welsh-language magazine from 1996 to 2011.

Dr Andrew Tate is Senior Lecturer in English and Associate Director of the Ruskin Programme at Lancaster University, where he teaches nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature. He is the author of three books: *Douglas Coupland* (2007); *Contemporary Fiction and Christianity* (2008) and *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic After 9/11* (2010, reviewed in this issue).

Dr Michael Ward is Chaplain of St Peter's College, Oxford. He is the author of *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis*, Oxford University Press, 2008, and the co-editor of *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

News and Notes

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Autumn conference 2011

Attend, or offer to read a paper at the CLSG autumn conference at Oxford on 5 November. 'Qualities of Heroism' will consider depictions of heroism (and perhaps antiheroism), a topic which may be taken to span writing from the Bible, Homer, accounts of saints and martyrs, and through Shakespeare, Thomas Carlyle, to present-day narratives. Offers of papers are invited by 31 May 2011. A call for papers will be sent to members of the e-list and posted on the sites of the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) and the University of Pennsylvania Calls for Papers. The CLSG website www.clsg.org gives full information and will be progressively updated.