

THE GLASS

NUMBER 16

SPRING 2004

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

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ISSN 0269-770X

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Editorial

From the first, truth was one side of the story, implying one line of action. Alternatives present themselves, speciously, aggressively, destructively. We like to think of truth prevailing, and of sweetness and light. But for the present it is not so, and in the garden Adam and Eve were beguiled. Even as Moses set out the Law, Aaron cast a golden calf. Solomon built the Jerusalem Temple, but he also put up a number of high places for Ashtoreth, Molech and other abominable deities, on Jerusalem's east side (2 Kings 23:13). Most of the NT letters are *contra* alternatives to the Gospel – Gnosticism, Judaistic legalism, antinomianism.

It can be argued that truth is necessarily relative, defined by circumstance and indeed by error. Christians tend to favour a logocentric view, and to believe that there are dependable verities, some of them human constructs, some discovered in the universe, others revealed by the Creator. The thread runs through theory and the texts of literature. In this issue some of Shakespeare's ethical and theological assumptions in *Measure for Measure* are under scrutiny. At the autumn conference on heresy at which Professor Nuttall's paper was presented, Dr Andrew Tate considered the novelist, specifically John Updike, as heretic. The central character in *Roger's Version* (indebted to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*) is a teacher of theology with expertise in heresies. Confronted by a student who will prove the existence of God using computer technology, Roger Lambert sets about undermining him with the ideas of Karl Barth. The relation between sexuality and religious belief, which preoccupies Updike as well as his protagonist, makes a pungent aspect of this novel.

In this issue we have a greater number of contributors than usual, and I owe them not only thanks but an apology that a series of computer problems delayed their publication. Members' offers of articles and reviews are always welcome, and the labour of reading and writing has the reward of a free copy of the volume. Most (not all) publishers respond generously to requests from *The Glass* for a copy of a recent book to be reviewed in our pages. Back numbers are beginning to appear in their entirety on our website, and we are to be found on the online database at <http://www.university-english.com/> Since our inception we have provided copies of *The Glass* to the Legal Deposit programme for the national libraries in the UK.

Roger Kojecký

Measure for Measure: Shakespeare's Essay on Heresy

A D Nuttall

I BELIEVE IT IS BAD FORM TO TALK ABOUT ONE'S OWN WRITINGS but I must do so now to explain what will follow¹. Some years ago I became interested in a certain violent heresy: that of 'Ophite Gnosticism'. 'Ophite' is from *ophis*, the Greek for 'serpent'; these are 'the Gnostics of the Serpent'. The Ophite Gnostics read Genesis in – to put it mildly – a different manner. They thought that God the Father was the evil party and the serpent good. This was made easier for them by the fact that Gnostics already thought, unlike the Christians, that the God who made this dreadful world was wicked. They readily identified the evil creator, Ialdabaoth, with the Jewish Jehovah². Also, as Gnostics, they thought knowledge was a good thing (*gnosis* and *knowledge* are etymologically cognate). As soon as the Ophites read that God the Father told Adam and Eve that they were not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge they said (in effect), 'You see? Anyone who forbids knowledge is an oppressor. Jehovah is clearly a jealous tyrant.' Meanwhile the serpent, against the orders of the tyrant, leads Adam and Eve to knowledge. You may already be inwardly protesting and wishing to point out that this was, after all, a knowledge which brought death into the world and all our woe, so that the serpent was hardly doing Adam and Eve a good turn. It is hard for us, belonging as we do to a Christian or post-Christian culture, to see how Genesis might read to an outsider. We have, built into us before we begin to read, the presumption that the serpent is Satan, the enemy of mankind. But the text of Genesis never says that. The serpent is just a snake. God tells Adam and Eve that if they eat from the tree they will die and most of us feel that he did not lie, because after this primal sin Adam, Eve and all human kind became subject to death. But an outsider could easily draw a different conclusion. When Eve says that God told them that if they ate from the tree they would die, the serpent answers, in Tyndale's admirable translation of 3:4, 'Tush, ye shall not dye'.³ A literal way – one might say a natural way – to understand God's threat or warning would be to suppose that Adam and Eve would fall down dead immediately upon biting into the apple. This certainly seems to be the way the serpent, who was there, takes it. But this obviously does not happen. After telling them that they won't fall down dead the serpent adds that the real consequence of their rebellious action will be that their eyes will be opened and they will become as gods, knowing good and evil (3:5). Here the serpent is certainly not lying. At 3:7, after the eating of the apple, we read, 'And the eyes of them both were opened' and at 3:22 we find *God* saying, 'Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.' We can see how a Gnostic reader could think it was obvious that Jehovah is a jealous, punitive figure and the snake his noble antagonist, the champion of

humanity. And now the Ophites say the really subversive thing: 'The serpent is Christ'.⁴ From this derives what I have called, in a book of that name, 'the alternative trinity'. In orthodox Christian teaching the trinity is, so to speak, a happy family; the Father and the Son get on well, see things from the same ethical point of view; for the Ophites the trinity is a dysfunctional family; the Son is the antagonist of the Father.

I first got into this material as a result of giving tutorials on William Blake. I used to ask my pupils to tell me whether Blake was a Christian. The replies were various but after a while I found that I could nevertheless predict the result. Those who concentrated on the figure of Christ as he appeared in Blake's writings came back and said, 'He is a great Christian poet.' Those who concentrated on the Father said, 'He is an anti-Christian subversive.' The reason for this is simple. Blake's trinity is plainly Gnostic. His father god, Urizen (clearly identified with Jehovah⁵) is an oppressor; his Christ is a liberator. In his notebook for 1810 Blake wrote, ungrammatically but still intelligibly, 'Thinking as I do that the Creator of this World is a very Cruel being and being a Worshipper of Christ I cannot help saying the Son O how unlike the Father...'⁶. I was at first puzzled; the immense interval between Blake and the Gnostics of the second century seemed to preclude influence. As I looked into the matter, however, I became more and more confident that there was no interval, that I was dealing with a *haeresis perennis*, or perpetual heresy that never disappeared in the intervening time, though it lived below ground for long periods.

In *The Alternative Trinity* I argued that traces of Ophite Gnosticism can be found in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and even, as a faint antiphonal sub-text, in Milton's supposedly monist, authoritarian *Paradise Lost*. In particular, antinomian Protestants of the seventeenth century liked to denounce the Ten Commandments given by the Father to Moses and to say, 'In Christ all things are lawful unto me' (1 Corinthians 6:12). Remember how Blake liked to demonstrate that Christ broke every one of the Ten Commandments.⁷

Now all this is pretty wild stuff. That it should be found in Blake, who was a sort of professional oppositionalist, is predictable. That we should meet it in Marlowe, who, like Lord Byron, was mad, bad and dangerous to know and had a reputation for diabolical heresy, is on the cards. That it should be intermittently discernible in Milton, given the constant co-presence in his writings of an anti-Milton, another self with whom he is locked in tense argument, is perhaps just credible (I believe it). But surely we shall not find this kind of weirdness, this harshly eccentric way of viewing the world, in Shakespeare? Shakespeare, after all, is nothing if not central. He is seen, with reason, as embodying the natural humanity of the nation and the species, as radiantly sane.

But it is also true that Shakespeare, as we say loosely, 'did everything'. Teachers of literature learn over the years to hesitate when embarking bravely upon sentences of the form: 'This will not be found before 1750', because, again and again it turns out that Shakespeare has actually done it, whatever it is – sometimes very briefly, but he has done it. If we set aside technological

advances, like mobile telephones, it is remarkably hard to think of anything Shakespeare has not thought of first, somewhere. Marxian, Freudian, feminist, structuralist, existentialist, materialist ideas are all there. Did he never consider Gnostic inverse theology?

I want to suggest that he did, and the play in which he does it is *Measure for Measure*, the darkest of the 'problem plays'. *Measure for Measure* is a comedy with an unusually neat and intricate plot. The Duke of Vienna has become aware that his indulgent rule has led to hideous disorder and sexual disease in the city. He accordingly appoints the severe Angelo to enforce the laws that have long lain idle. The Duke then tells everyone he is going away but actually remains on the scene, disguised as a friar. Angelo, applying the law, sentences one Claudio to death, for contracting a clandestine marriage. Claudio's sister, Isabella, who is about to become a nun, pleads with Angelo for her brother's life. Angelo tells her he will spare her brother if she will submit to his base lust. Isabella, horrified, tells her brother of this vile proposal and is horrified again when he entreats her to comply. The disguised Duke then steps forward to solve the problem. Angelo was formerly 'espoused *de futuro*' (rather like our notion of engagement) to a certain Mariana. Before the action of the play begins Angelo had pulled out of this 'betrothal'. Any *de futuro* espousal is automatically converted to full matrimony if the parties consummate the relationship. The Duke arranges that Mariana should be substituted for Isabella in Angelo's bed under cover of darkness, so that at the very moment when he thinks he is working his will on Isabella he is in fact cementing the marriage with Mariana. Angelo, rattling on his promise to Isabella, proceeds meanwhile with the execution of Claudio but here again is tricked by the Duke, who arranges that the head of Ragozine, a pirate who died the same night, be substituted for Claudio's. The play ends with forgiveness for all, including Angelo. In the warm glow, the Duke graciously offers his hand in marriage to the novice, Isabella. Substitution mirrors substitution with a satisfying elegance. The play is like a minuet.

The Moral Consistency of Angelo

But, if it is a minuet, it is danced to crashing discords. Shakespeare appears to be writing deliberately to achieve maximum discomfort at the ethical or ideological level. The 'good' characters of the play are disquietingly inconsistent. When the Duke appoints Angelo he has two motives, which sit uneasily together. He wants to find out if Angelo is a hypocrite and he wishes to put in place a strong magistrate who will deal with the social evil. More importantly, he obviously accepts from the beginning that there is an *ethical* case for severity but at the end of the play undoes any good that may have been achieved by forgiving everyone in sight (he will need another Angelo in fourteen years). Why does he not apply the rules himself? He can hardly start punishing them now, he explains, when by his leniency he virtually told them to abandon restraint (I.iii.35-7). Although sixteenth century political theorists held that there could be a thoroughly moral reason for delegating

unpopular offices (essentially, to save the *office*, rather than the person of the prince from potentially damaging obloquy)⁸ the thought that the Duke is pusillanimously getting someone else to do his dirty work is hard to avoid. Isabella is clear that Claudio deserves punishment (she argues, precisely for *forgiveness* of a real sin, not that he is guiltless). Yet she welcomes the morally parallel stratagem of the bed-trick (the private marriage of Claudio and Juliet and the marriage by consummation into which Angelo is tricked are both equally clandestine and therefore strictly illegal – no priest officiated on either occasion). Isabella has resolved upon celibacy but makes no audible protest at the end when the duke does not so much propose as assume that the two of them will be married. The one person who is utterly consistent at the level of moral principle, from beginning to end, is Angelo.

When Isabella went to Angelo to plead for her brother she thought she had a ‘knock-down’ argument. She could afford, she thought, to explain how she agreed with Angelo (and she does agree) that Claudio deserved punishment, because she had in reserve an argument that would blow all such reasons away; Angelo is right at the level of justice; but justice itself is transcended – eclipsed – by mercy. At II.ii.100, she says, as she thinks unanswerably, ‘Yet show some pity.’ But Angelo answers. He says, ‘I show it most of all when I show justice; / For then I pity those I do not know’. To Isabella’s claim that mercy gloriously soars above mere justice, he replies, in effect, ‘No; the one is entangled in the other.’ He means that if you are responsible for the inhabitants of a city, know that unrestrained crime will hurt large numbers of people, are able to restrain that crime, and then you do *not* restrain it, that is itself a kind of cruelty, is unmerciful to the un-named, faceless innocent. Isabella challenges Angelo with the scriptural argument: ‘He that is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone’ (John 8:7) – in effect that only the sinless can properly judge and punish. But again Angelo has an answer: one obviously cannot let the murderers and rapists do as they like simply because there are no sinless policemen or magistrates; what one can do is make sure that the agents of the law are themselves subject to that law, so that if a magistrate is caught out he too is punished. At II.i.29-31 he applies this expressly to himself, saying that if he ever offends, he must be punished by the same rule. At the end of the play his last words are an insistence that he, Angelo, must be punished (V.i.474-5). There is a sense in which the Duke’s ultimate forgiveness insults him.

Substitution, that slick mechanism of comedy plotting, is the key to the play, because, at another level – the ethical – substitution becomes the locus of an intense discordancy. The Duke makes Angelo a substitute for himself, bestows upon him the office of governor: ‘Be thou at full ourself’ (I.i.43). In the Italian source, Cinthio’s *Hecatommithi* (1565), Maximian (who corresponds to the Duke) sends his officer away to Innsbruck, where the events of the story take their course. Shakespeare’s Duke, as we saw, tells everyone he is going away but in fact never leaves. He remains in the city, a shadowy figure – ‘the fantastical Duke of dark corners (IV.iii.156) – standing behind Angelo, watching him at work. The effect of the change is greatly

to intensify our sense that Angelo, himself far from shadowy but, rather, brilliantly illuminated, represents the Duke, is his substitute. When Claudio is forfeit to the law Angelo invites Isabella, in effect, to take Claudio's place, to suffer instead; her virtue is to be a price paid for Claudio's life. Mariana is substituted for Isabella in Angelo's bed. Ragozine's head is substituted for Claudio's. It is the idea of substitution that finally carries us into the realm of theology. Central to Christianity is the doctrine of the Atonement. This is, precisely, an act of substitution. When Christ died on the cross he gave himself as a substitute for human kind; he bore the pains that our sins deserve. According to one version of the doctrine, in doing this Christ paid off the Devil, who had a right to us because of our wickedness.⁹ Later a feeling grew that it was beneath the dignity and power of God to do any sort of deal with the Devil and Anselm said that Christ suffered on the cross to satisfy *God's* own requirement of justice while simultaneously affording mercy to humankind.¹⁰

Usually Shakespeare steers clear of theology. But in *Measure for Measure* it is allowed in. Isabella, with a wonderful hesitancy as at a truth too shaming, too glorious to be put into words, reminds Angelo of Christ's merciful Atonement: 'Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once, / And he that might the vantage best have took / Found out the remedy' (II.ii.73-5). It will be said, there is nothing Gnostic about this; Isabella is offering Angelo a beautiful, healing, reconciling thought. I answer, yes, she is, but Isabella is not the only person in the play. We have already seen how she does not have uncontested ethical sway over the drama in which she figures. When Portia makes her famous speech about the quality of mercy in *The Merchant of Venice* it appears to carry all before it, to be absolutely higher than the retributive justice of the Old Law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. This is indeed to be found in the Gospels: 'Love ye your enemies; be ye therefore merciful as your Father is merciful' (Luke 6:35). Here the reason for avoiding retaliatory justice is that justice is simply transcended by mercy. But the passage in Luke continues, 'Judge not, *that ye be not judged.*' Suddenly we are given another reason: justice belongs to the Father, not to you; if you usurp his place – *substitute* yourself for him – he may not be so merciful after all; he may judge *you*. We now have, already, an implicit collision. According to the first proposition humankind has, so to speak, emerged from the benighted ethic of retaliation into the upper air of unconditional mercy, but then the second proposition suggests that God the Father remains locked, meanwhile, in the old law of 'Thou shalt not'. There is now an implicit tension between the judging Father and Christ's doctrine of loving forgiveness (Christ rejects the *lex talionis* at Matthew 5:38). The title of this play, note, is not *Love Triumphant* but *Measure for Measure*. It points to the second, darker proposition: 'With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you' (Mark 4:24). We are in the world of 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord' (Romans 12:19).

Many years ago Roy W Battenhouse wrote an article called '*Measure for Measure* and the Christian Doctrine of the Atonement'.¹¹ Battenhouse sought,

with some difficulty, to identify the Duke's role in the play with God's role in his universe. If we forget Christ and think only of the Father, this can begin to work (the phrase, 'like power divine', is applied to the Duke at V.i.367). But the doctrine of the Atonement forces us to think of Christ also. Is there a Christ figure in the play? There is, but it is not the kind of person we might expect to see in such a part. We have to ask who takes upon his shoulders the burden of sin so that we can be happy. The answer is Angelo. Yet Angelo, we all know, is diabolically wicked. I said earlier that it is hard to think of anything Shakespeare has not thought of first. It is so here. We have reached a point where we are suddenly halted, mentally paralysed by a figure simultaneously redemptive and Satanic. But Shakespeare knows what he has done. At V.i.30 Isabella says, looking at Angelo, 'You bid me seek redemption of the devil.'

Of course in orthodox Christian theology Christ remains sinless and Angelo, very evidently, does not. Christ bore the *consequences* of our sins. It may be supposed that people of the early modern period, if they were sure of anything, were sure of this. It turns out, however, that Protestant theologians of the sixteenth century had doubts on precisely this point. To begin with, the language of scripture is distinctly odd: 'Himself took our infirmities' (Matthew 8:17); 'For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, that knew no sin' (2 Corinthians 5:21). Calvin was not content to say that Christ simply took the punishment; our guilt also was passed to him (*Institutes*, II. xvi. 6). In his 1535 lectures on Galatians Luther is scornful of the idea (which he thinks Popish) that Christ took only the consequences of our sins, insisting that the words of scripture clearly mean that Christ actually sinned; to flinch from this truth, to 'unclthe' Christ of our sins, 'This is to abolish Christ'.¹² Christ's cry of dereliction on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46) has always embarrassed orthodox Trinitarians; if Christ is God how could he think that God had abandoned him? It also seems to work against the doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ. It looks very like despair – perhaps the worst sin of all. Luther believed that Christ despaired.¹³ The humiliation of Christ is absolute. We are being propelled, not by cranks and eccentrics but by revered doctors of the Protestant Church, into a twilit region; we may begin to think of the wretched 'sin-eater' of the medieval village or of the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:10) which, the anthropologists tell us, lies behind the figure of the suffering Christ.

The Ophite blurring of the line that separates the Devil, the enemy of the Father, from Christ the redeemer of mankind is present in *Measure for Measure*. There is a story by Borges called 'The Three Versions of Judas'¹⁴ about a theologian who held that, in order to identify the true Christ we must ask, first, 'Who is necessary to the economy of salvation, who must be there, bearing the burden, that the load may fall from the shoulders of the rest of us?' and, second, 'Who has been hated and reviled ever since?' He concludes that Christendom got it wrong; that Judas was the true Christ. Angelo is simultaneously the redeemer of Vienna and the polluted one.

I have said that the Ophite inversion can be glimpsed in Marlowe's *Doctor*

Faustus. Marlowe, demonstrably, was aware of Gnostic writings linked to the figure of Simon Magus, 'the first of the Gnostics', who haunts the play. Shakespeare obviously knew Marlowe's writings and probably knew Marlowe personally. But in Shakespeare's hands these inverse ideas take on an energy, a capacity for fresh moves, that I cannot find in Marlowe, Milton or even in Blake. Shakespeare's main innovation is to make the sacrificed Christ figure himself a figure of retribution. Angelo is a legal precisionist, a believer in punishment; *this* is his sin.

Angelo – Sin Bearer

It will be said that Angelo's greatest sin is his blackmailing of Isabella for sexual purposes. How does this (surely unequivocal) evil figure in the heretical paradox of the play? As far as I can see, it does not figure there at all, in any direct fashion. Of course the whole episode is necessary to the comedy plot and helps to generate, in due course, the dance of substitutions already noticed. But the Duke never authorized Angelo's vile behaviour. Angelo, however, is absolutely clear that this sin was indeed a sin. There is a certain ethical heroism in his readiness to apply the principle of punishment in his own case. In this steely consistency he differs notably from the good Duke. At a deeper level, perhaps, it is necessary that the sacrificial bearer of sins should be completely humiliated, that the ice-pure Angelo should experience the blackest sexual desire, just as Luther felt that the sacrifice of Christ was less than complete if Christ did not actually sin. The completed sequence operates to enhance our sense of the possible moral dignity of punitive government and this, in its turn, makes it just a little easier to expose the assumed supremacy of mercy to criticism. But the heretical paradox becomes importunately evident when we turn to Angelo's other sin, the sin of unforgiving judgement. In the eyes of the happy persons of the comedy, punitive judgement is itself wicked when set beside the transcending ethic of mercy. The sin that is carried by Angelo – and 'carried by' now means 'committed by' – is the sin of judging. Of course by Angelo's ethic all this is turned round. From his point of view (though he never argues egoistically in this way) the hated officer bears the *consequences of their sin* (as in orthodoxy) – since the sin, for him, is irresponsible leniency. Shakespeare knows that most people in his audience will detest Angelo and warm to Isabella's words on pity (whether she wins the argument or not). But meanwhile it is equally clear, as the good Duke conceded at the beginning, that somebody has to be the bad guy, if the rest are to find space to be happy again. But 'being the bad guy' is now 'being the policeman'.

As Christianity hardens into orthodoxy the absolute superiority of mercy becomes an automatic assumption, becomes, perhaps, too easy. In a way Ophite Gnosticism embodies an exaggerated version of this way of thinking. In Gnosticism the Father is bad and in William Blake it is plain that the father is bad because he is judgemental; the practice of justice is itself a kind of tyranny. Christ, the friend to humanity, is the opposite of all this. The Ophites said that the serpent was Christ but largely confined their attention

to the narrative of Genesis. But who is Christ? Christ is the redeemer. By introducing the device of substitution and ringing the changes on its possible implications Shakespeare sets fire to the whole scheme. The Atonement rather than the Garden of Eden is now at the centre. Yet the Atonement itself, especially as it is interpreted by thoroughly orthodox Anselm, can re-awaken the Gnostic idea of a harsh Father and a loving Son. Anselm, as I said, held that Christ suffered on the cross, not to satisfy Satan but to satisfy *God's* requirement of justice even while being merciful to humanity. If we hold strongly to Trinitarian orthodoxy there is no great ethical discomfort here: the Father and Jesus are both equally God, so God gives himself to himself, in agony, to meet the requirement of pure justice. But it is very easy to get the feeling (partly because of the sheer oddity, which Wittgenstein would seize on, of being constrained to a strange transfer of payment to meet, technically, a rule one has made oneself) that we are dealing here with separate persons, that the Father requires justice ('Vengeance is mine') and is willing to let the Son do the suffering. Anselm himself hesitates between the two versions.¹⁵ The second, note, is not a million miles away from the Ophite scheme, in which the Father is a tyrant and the Son our friend, but all is now played out in the field of substitutionary theology.

Now observe what Shakespeare has done. He has identified the humiliated redeemer with the authoritarian judge, but, because of the now settled ascendancy of the ethic of mercy, this judge is no longer an unfettered tyrant, having uncontested power. He is on the run, defeated before he starts, at the hands of the happy ones. They are the blessed, standing in the light; Angelo, stained by his rigorism, stands in shadow. 'Vengeance is mine,' says the Lord, secure in his omnipotence. 'Justice is mine,' says Angelo – and must then continue lamely (like a suffering servant), 'It's all right – you people don't have to do a thing – you can keep your hands clean.'

When the Christians were an underground sect, meeting in catacombs in Rome, they could afford to be absolutely merciful because the non-Christian Roman cops would deal with anything really nasty. Then the emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity and suddenly the cops were Christians, and so were the magistrates. As Angelo quietly observed to Isabella, if you are *in charge*, and know that leniency will cause many people (whom you may never meet) to be hurt, leniency becomes, by context, cruelty. What could the Christians do now? Famously, they came up with the theory of vicarious judgement, whereby the magistrate decides not as himself but as the representative or substitute for God (who, very fortunately, is still allowed to be judgemental). As we saw, varying structures of substitution are explored brilliantly in *Measure for Measure*. Note that, since the Duke expressly appoints Angelo to enforce the law strictly, Angelo is now his vicar or substitute and the Duke bears the responsibility, just as God bears the responsibility, in the post-Constantinian courts. Shakespeare's Duke, however, by withdrawing to the shadows almost succeeds in making his instigating role invisible, or at least obscure. Although he wants measure to have measure he manipulates the lighting. Lucio's careless remark about the

Duke resonates beyond its immediate context: he 'would have dark deeds darkly answered' (III.ii.171). But the great substitution, implicitly central to the play, is that of the Atonement. Shakespeare gives us a redemption in which the demonised Angelo is a kind of Christ figure. This is audacious enough. He then moves again, and makes this hated Christ a God-the-Father figure, a bearer of justice. This, it seems to me, is breathtaking.

I do not claim that *Measure for Measure* is clear Gnostic critique of orthodox Christianity. We are dealing here with hints and suggestions only. But it is clear to me that 'steady, central Shakespeare' could visit the wilder shores of thought. He did so on many occasions. *Measure for Measure* is his most daring essay on the relation between ethics and theology. The preliminary structure is Ophite Gnostic in its readiness to merge the Devil with Christ, but I do not claim that Shakespeare is drawing on any specific Ophite source. There is no great problem, as I have already suggested, in supposing that he could have known something of the Gnostics. Marlowe, it seems,¹⁶ knew the (pseudo-)Clementine *Recognitions*, which contains some vertiginous Gnostic material and could easily have rambled on about this in some pub (we know from 'the Baines note' how unguarded Marlowe could be in casual conversation). Donne, who was born eight years after Shakespeare, knows about the Gnostics.¹⁷ This was dangerous stuff but was less completely hidden than many scholars suppose. But my guess is that Shakespeare got there simply by thinking very hard about the moral resonances of substitution. There is an electric intelligence in the placing of the word 'grace' in Angelo's final plea for punishment: 'Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death / Is all the grace I beg' (V.i.371-2). Of course the first meaning of *grace* here is the human, social meaning: 'the favour of a superior'. But in a play so theologically fraught the theological meaning cannot be wholly absent: 'the un-earned, inexplicable generosity of God'. Normally this takes the form of the remission of punishment, the lifting of damnation. But for Angelo mercy is the suffocating thing and, conversely, the principled application of the punishment he knows he deserves would be a favour. I have referred to Portia's speech in *The Merchant of Venice* as a simple example of an unproblematic ethic of mercy. But in fact a fierce scepticism is already discoverable in the subtext of this, the earlier play. That said, fragments of remembered chat with Marlowe may conceivably have speeded up his thought processes.

As a result, now, in 2003, he still challenges our deepest assumptions. We are the natural heirs of the Duke and his friends. Throughout the play Angelo's name is dinned in our ears, meaning what? – 'angel'? 'Messenger'? 'Lucifer'? The Duke meanwhile is never addressed by name in the play but we know what that name is: Vincentio, 'the winner'. Today we have come to use 'heresy' and 'subversive' as terms of praise and welcome, or think we welcome, the rebel. But a rebel who is immediately welcome cannot, it seems to me, be much of a rebel at all. Who in such a world is *really offensive*? Not the law-breaker. In the writings of Foucault it is the word 'policing' that carries an automatic charge of condemnation. All is well in a way as long as the heretic is preaching indulgence. But when this very doctrine becomes

orthodoxy, a new kind of heretic, despised as the early apostles of mercy were despised, appears: the believer in punitive justice. One can imagine Shakespeare quietly smiling as we condemn – notice how judgemental that word is! – the new heretic. Where subversion is universally applauded the real subversive may be the authoritarian. I said earlier that if mercy is absolutely higher than justice a justice-dispensing Father God is himself relegated to the shadows, denied the enlightenment vouchsafed to human kind (but invoked with some relief by a society pressed by the practical difficulties of dealing with crime, to do the dirty work). It is as if Shakespeare, who is famous for being able to sympathize with anyone, had a grain of sympathy for the now degraded omnipotent Father! It will be evident why I think Angelo is a God-the-Father figure as well as a Christ figure. This is deeply uncomfortable for us (for me too). We know what Milton thought about almost everything. I have no idea what Shakespeare thought, finally, about anything. But all this – the warmth and the discomfort – he certainly foresaw.

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- ¹ This essay overlaps in places with my book, *The Alternative Trinity*, Oxford, 1998, and also with my article, 'Measure for Measure: Quid pro Quo?' *Shakespeare Studies*, 4 (1968), 231-51. I am indebted to Subha Mukherji for various suggestions and to William Poole for alerting me to the possible resonances of the names 'Angelo' and 'Vincenzio'.
- ² See e.g. *The Apocryphon of John* in Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, London, 1987, pp. 46 and 49.
- ³ In the Pentateuch of 1530, fo. iv.
- ⁴ See Augustine, *De Haeresibus*, I. xvii; in J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, vol. xlii, p. 28 and Epiphanius, *Panarion*, xxxviii, trans. F. Williams, London, 1987), pp. 241, 242.
- ⁵ See e.g. *Vala, or the Four Zoas*, iv. 38-9.
- ⁶ In *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman, New York, 1988, p. 565.
- ⁷ *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plate 23 and *The Everlasting Gospel*, esp. f. 11-14, in Erdman, pp. 43, 521.
- ⁸ See Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), trans. L. K. Born, New York, 1936, p. 210. There is here no whiff of immoralism. On the other hand, Machiavelli's account of the manner in which Cesare Borgia first employed Messer Remiro d'Orco, 'a cruel and able man', to tighten up the laws in the province and afterwards made himself universally popular by contriving a spectacular death for the hated officer is immediately shocking and must always have been so (*The Prince*, trans. Luigi Ricci, London, Grant Richards, 1903, pp. 27-8).
- ⁹ See e.g. Origen, *Commentaria in Matthaem*, xiii, 8, 9, in Migne, *Patrologia (Series Graeca)*, vol. xiii, p. 1115.
- ¹⁰ In *Cur Deus Homo?*
- ¹¹ *PMLA*, 61 (1946), 1029-59.
- ¹² In *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan, 56 vols., St Louis Miss., 1955-86, vol. xxvi (1963), p. 279.
- ¹³ See *Dr Martin Luthers Werke*, ed. J. K. F. Knaake et al., Weimar, 1883-, vol. v, p. 602.
- ¹⁴ In his *Ficciones*, Buenos Aires, 1962, pp. 151-7.
- ¹⁵ On a single page he writes, first, 'He offered Himself to Himself' and then 'The Son

THE GLASS

freely offered Himself to the Father', in *Cur Deus Homo?*, II. xviii (xix in Migne's numbering), in *Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. J. Hopkins and H. Richardson, 4 vols., London, 1974-6, vol. ii, p. 133; in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. clviii, p. 428.

¹⁶ See Philip Brockbank, *Marlowe: Dr Faustus*, London, 1962, pp. 10-11.

¹⁷ See his sermon preached on Easter Monday, 1622.

TRUST THE TORTOISE

Old fellow oozing past us in his private dome,
his own nave, reminds us of us, naturally.
All our colleagues at the zoo usually do
give us a preview of metamorphosis and eternity.
Unpressed for time, or unimpressed,
they show their mirrors of the audience in palmy
days at age 30, 40, 50. We try to age gracefully
as a gazelle but, leapin' lizards, we usually fail.
Everyone gets 365 chances and a new calendar.
Want wings? If you can reinvent yourself, then do.
It's as easy as sliding into the baptismal pool,
sleek as a seal or noisy as a parrot at prayer. Real.
Above all, be patient. The tortoise slowly hauls
portraits into church, through the looking glass.

Mary Kennan Herbert

‘I was guilty’: Interpretation as heresy in John Updike’s *Roger’s Version*

Andrew Tate

[T]he Christian faith has given me comfort in my life and, I would like to think, courage in my work. For it tells us that truth is holy, and truth-telling a noble and useful profession; that the reality around us is created and worth celebrating; that men and women are radically imperfect and radically valuable . . .¹

JOHN UPDIKE, THE CREATOR OF HARRY ‘RABBIT’ ANGSTROM AND Henry Bech, fictional chronicler of bourgeois American life since 1959, author of twenty novels and dozens more volumes of poetry, short stories and critical prose, is a theological writer with a peculiar penchant for sin. His narratives are replete with the chaotic consequences of minor indiscretions, comically juvenile bad behaviour and the tragedy of serious transgression. Yet these sinful fictions are redeemed by an apparently inexhaustible creator’s sympathy for the erring individuals who are as prolific in their repeated misdemeanours as Updike is in his compulsive literary production. The writer’s many adulterous anti-heroes are extravagantly multiple in their betrayals and his liars create untruths which beget yet more falsehoods. The ‘radically imperfect’ lives of these fragile and sometimes unrepentantly corrupt characters illuminate daring and richly problematic fictions of guilt, unwarranted grace and the cruel economies of human relations.

This New England novelist’s turn towards the transgressive is not, in itself, unique, but a kind of repetition or echo. Good fiction and the Christian metanarrative are, after all, both dependent on their protagonists making disastrously bad choices. Indeed, Michael Edwards maintains that

Literature occurs because we inhabit a fallen world. Explicitly or obscurely, it is part of our dispute with that world, and of our search for its and our own regeneration. It begins in alienation, and stands over against a reality which it perceives as exilic and mortal.²

As a genre, the novel, which of all literary forms best represents the movement of the individual conscience and consciousness through the disarray of history, seems to need original sin.³ Without a fall, in orthodox terms the deliberate rejection of truth and responsibility, narrative has no beginning. If Dickens’ Pip had renounced pride, stayed in the forge and emulated Joe Gargery’s Christian humility, there could be no *Great Expectations*. Should James Gatz have recognized the futility of pursuing a chimerical American dream, Nick Carraway would not have narrated *The Great Gatsby*. Pip and Gatsby misread the world and, in so doing, they simultaneously fall into sin and create the occasion of story, with all its

disorderliness and hope.

Updike's fiction, though freighted with a specifically Christian theology, rarely offers up conventional pilgrim journeys of fall, painful conversion and glorious redemption. Indeed, in these novels wickedness often seems to prevail, the immoral go unpunished and the morally pure are ruined. Although we can rarely take unambiguous spiritual succour from novels like those in the *Rabbit* tetralogy, Updike limns a world stripped of consoling illusions rather than one without redeeming grace.

Indeed, his work might embody Patrick Sherry's argument that a writer's 'seeming preoccupation with evil' is often 'linked closely with a desire to suggest the action of grace.'⁴ The unpredictable 'motions of Grace', in a phrase of Blaise Pascal's used by Updike as the epigraph to *Rabbit, Run*, lead the writer to some desolate places, both figurative and literal, often far without the consecrated and secure ground of orthodox faith.

Judgement of this spiritually complex American novelist seems to fix around the polarities of enthused devotion and disappointed contempt. Is he a heroic narrator of the troubled Christian life or merely a fractious, if refined, stylist who is guilty, as one early critic pronounced, of having 'nothing to say'?⁵ This article will address the conflicting constructions of Updike and the ambivalent conclusions that have been drawn regarding the spiritual value, or otherwise, of his fiction.

Truth in Heresy

On 11 September 1997, Updike, in his sixty-sixth year, was awarded the Champion Medal by the Catholic Book Club as a 'distinguished Christian person of letters'. In his acceptance speech, the novelist indicated that for a middle-class Protestant American the receipt of such an award, named after St Edmund Champion, the 'brilliant Jesuit' who was tortured and martyred in 1581, was somewhat 'disconcerting':

It is all too easy a thing to be a Christian in America, where God's name is on our coinage, pious pronouncements are routinely expected from elected officials, and churchgoing, though far from unanimous, enjoys a popularity astounding to Europeans.⁶

Evans echoes Updike's discomfort with a nation in which religious belief is an easy element of a citizen's cultural capital and, in fact, argues that '[t]he "American Way of Life" might itself be regarded as a more or less conscious performance of the Pelagian heresy, for it teaches that people can both be good and "get on in life" simply by trying hard'.⁷ Against the conventional image of nominal middle-American piety – which is the religious world that Updike knows best – the novelist further insists that to be authentically Christian 'in this day and age, as in the time of imperial Rome, is to be unorthodox'. Even in accepting a Catholic sponsored honour, Updike insists that the authentic Christian heritage originates in heretical challenges to authority. He also admonishes religiously minded readers who seek easy consolation or 'glimpses of mollifying holiness' in literary fiction created by

authors who also happen to be Christians. Such a hope, he notes, is likely to be dashed in the frequently desolate literary fiction of such twentieth-century believers as Muriel Spark and Flannery O'Connor. Elsewhere Updike has argued that the 'bleak world they display, often comic in its desolation and inconsequence' is most certainly

– not the world of arrived faith and its consolations but the fallen world whose emptiness, perhaps, led them to make the leap of faith. And given the limits of hagiography (biography of saints) and the ineffability of God, isn't that all a novelist can be expected to deliver – *this* world, in its pain and mangled glory?⁸

Yet, for all his emphasis on the realities of struggle and failure, this recipient of an award named after a Christian martyr has since been described as 'of all theological writers, one of the most complacent'. Whilst Updike confesses that ambiguity and 'hollowness' are integral to an authentic Christian experience, James Wood, in his provocative 1998 study *The Broken Estate*, claims that this novelist's supposedly spiritually driven fiction only 'stages theological arguments which are foreclosed. Doubt, or its opposite, fervency is not taken seriously in [his] work.'⁹

Similarly, David Lyle Jeffrey hears in the Biblical cadences of Updike's fiction not a genuinely Christian voice but the fading echo of dying tradition; he believes the novels seek 'to demonstrate their moral seriousness by pillory of any available living traces' of the 'tarnished' 'legacy of decadent New England Puritanism'.¹⁰ Updike's most robust defender as a significant theological artist has been James Yerkes who argues that 'the religious consciousness in Updike may best be characterized as our sense of an unavoidable, unbearable, and unbelievable Sacred Presence'.¹¹ This trinity of negation (the God or, more vaguely, the 'Sacred Presence' who is 'unavoidable, unbearable, and unbelievable') is indicative of Updike's ambivalent negotiations with theology and its crucial, if frequently painful role in his fiction.

We might locate Updike in the tradition of Christian literary heresy explored by Valentine Cunningham in a plenary lecture at Loughborough University's *Radical Soul* conference (2002) on the necessity of heresy, in which he argued that heterodox, dissenting readings often represent the search for a purer mode of understanding. For Cunningham there is an inevitable, creative play between orthodoxy and heresy that generates engaged spirituality and dynamic literature. Similarly in the relatively conservative *Brief History of Heresy*, G R Evans uses the example of the church reformer Jan Hus (c.1369-1415) whose criticism of Rome led to his excommunication and death at the stake: he sought purity and was damned as a heretic. In *On Reading the Books of Heretics*, Hus cited St Paul's counterintuitive defence of dissent even in the search for unity in the body of believers ['For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.' (1 Corinthians 11:19)]. According to Hus' perspective '[t]he books of the heretics . . . have the capacity to stir up spirituality, to clarify the truth, and, paradoxically, to

encourage the reader to seek the truth so as to avoid falling into the same errors': 'The books of the heretics are to be read, not burned, so long as there is truth in what they say.'¹²

Theological Architecture

I will focus on the structure and consequences of heretical thinking and behaviour in Updike's 1986 novel *Roger's Version*, with its disorderly blurring of sex and spirit, orthodoxy and dissent and examine his novelistic configuration of the heretic. *Roger's Version* is one of Updike's three, non-sequential contemporary re-tellings of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), the first truly great American work of prose fiction. This thematic trilogy, including *A Month of Sundays* (1975) and *S* (1988), tests its nineteenth-century progenitor and, just as Hawthorne was wrestling with the ghosts of Puritan New England including those of his own apparently tyrannical ancestors, so does Updike enter into a contest with Hawthorne's representation of Christian identity. Donald J Greiner has traced Updike's engagement with *The Scarlet Letter* and argues that the trilogy 'bows to Hawthorne even as it challenges Hawthorne's "war" between flesh and spirit.'¹³ In an essay on the tormented New England writer's 'creed', Updike describes *The Scarlet Letter* as '[America's] classic novel of religious conscience and religious suffering'; it is the text with which all narrators of the American sacred experience, in its exalted and despairing forms, must come to terms. For Updike, the elliptical, tortured Puritan world evoked by Hawthorne's prose is a curious, threatening phantom:

A very vivid ghost of Christianity stares out at us from his prose, alarming and odd in not being dead, but alive in some limbs and amputated in others, blurred in some aspects and otherwise basilisk-keen.¹⁴

This spectral or 'undead' faith, so troubling to Hawthorne, is a restless spirit, and one that continues to haunt the house of fiction. The claims of historic Christianity as well as its expedient language invigorate the contemporary British and American novel to ambivalent effect. The post-secular pilgrimage of Douglas Coupland, for example, is marked by his characters' urgent search for belief in an eternal, personal God; by contrast Jim Crace, committed to an atheist-materialist creed, has confronted the limits of his own non-belief in re-writing Jesus Christ's sojourn in the desert in *Quarantine* (1997). Philip Pullman's Romantic belief in a 'Republic of Heaven' as represented in his subversive re-interpretation of *Paradise Lost, His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) is nonetheless dependent on a challenging encounter with the Old Testament. For Updike, however, theology is more than an aesthetic or ethical digression; rather it is fundamental to the architecture of his fiction. His narratives absorb, contest and are shaped by conflicting traditions within Christian theology. No other major exponent of prose fiction, perhaps since Bunyan, has confronted the disciplines of Protestant divinity so explicitly. Few of Updike's twenty novels evade the burden of this continual Christian wrestling with writing about God and a number carry epigraphs from his

alternative theological forefathers. The tormented existential faith of Sören Kierkegaard, the liberalism of Paul Tillich and, most notably for this paper, the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth pervade his work. In the most recent article on the novel's theology, J Todd Billings argues that in common with Paul Tillich 'and other theologians of culture, Updike in *Roger's Version* is unsatisfied with a self-congratulatory secular narrative.'¹⁵ It is less clear whether he views the body of the church as a viable alternative to the failing aspirations of the world. Where Billings traces the liberal echoes of Tillich, I want to focus on his use of Barth, another heretical figure. This father of neo-orthodoxy rejected the traditions of nineteenth-century liberal theology and proclaimed that God can never be fathomed, approached or defined by humanity but must remain *totaliter aliter*, wholly other. Updike uses Barth, and in particular, the 1956 lecture 'The Humanity of God', to reappraise Hawthorne's narrative of religious guilt. Updike believed that Hawthorne's Christianity was one of radical dualism: where 'orthodox doctrine bridges matter and spirit with a scandalous Incarnation, Jesus Christ'. For Hawthorne 'matter verges upon being evil; virtue, upon being insubstantial'.¹⁶ The Barthian elements of *Roger's Version* deconstruct the gnostic tendencies of its parent text.

Updike, like all heretics, is engaged in acts of textual appropriation: these might be viewed as violent or recuperative. His process of rewriting is a multiple transgression against Hawthorne: three times he denies and capitulates to his literary forefather. This 'sin', however, might be read as a kind of religious literary strategy. James Schiff, who has offered the most comprehensive exploration of the trilogy's intertextual relationship with Hawthorne's romance, crucially defines *The Scarlet Letter* as a mythic text of the American imagination. He argues that the novel reflects upon 'the formation of America as the New Eden'.¹⁷ Hawthorne was able to see the disparity between the exalted visions of his Puritan forefathers and the destructive, inhumane severity of their colonial regime. Updike, writing almost a century and a half after Hawthorne, narrates a further falling away of John Winthrop's vision of New England as a 'city upon a hill'.

Terry Eagleton has famously argued that '[a]ll literary works . . . are "rewritten", if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them; indeed there is no reading of a work which is not also a "re-writing"'.¹⁸ Such acts of re-vision, of course, are not a one-way process, in which an enlightened present can appropriate and renovate the imaginative worlds of a less sophisticated culture. 'The past was not dead' proclaims Hawthorne in his digressive memoir-preface to the novel. 'The Custom House' reflects on the forceful re-emergence of repressed histories and contests the confidence of the present day, mercantile America to transcend the terrors of its Puritan past.

The Scarlet Letter haunts the secular-sacred world of *Roger's Version*. Updike uses the triangular relationship, adulterous plot and theological anxiety of its *Urtext* and relocates this classic narrative sequence to the (1980s) present, into the context of Reaganomics, the rise of the religious right and, less explicitly, connects it with the annihilation anxieties of cold

war science. Retrospectively we might read this authoritarian moment, when the American people turned towards an obdurately conservative administration, as a kind of reiteration of the decadent Puritan theocracy of the seventeenth century, with its fear of chaos and disruptive desire, as narrated by Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*. The Puritan past, Updike implies, is not dead but restless and threatening to take its revenge on a superficially liberal, democratic United States nostalgic for a mythic, misplaced stability. 'The haunted is a degenerate form of the sacred,' Updike reflects in the essay on 'Hawthorne's Creed', and *Roger's Version* narrates the reanimation of a spectral New England Puritanism, seeking a new host in the body of contemporary America.¹⁹

Natural theology vs. Barth

In Roger Lambert, a licentious theology professor at a New England Divinity school, Updike creates an echo, at once faithful and ironic, of Hawthorne's quasi-demonic Roger Chillingworth. The cuckolded manipulator of *The Scarlet Letter*, so often associated with occult ritual and fleshly vengeance, is brought to both the (a)moral and narratological centre of the re-imagined fiction. Where Chillingworth is a ghostly parasite who executes a secret punishment on his wife's anguished lover (the zealous, guilt-ravaged Puritan minister Arthur Dimmesdale), from the blurred margins of the narrative, Updike's Roger is a garrulous, eloquent and candid opponent. His antagonist is a young, awkward evangelical who believes the existence of God might be proved via rapidly evolving information technology. He confronts Updike's wildly unreliable narrator, whose area of research focuses on heresy in the early Christian church, with a thesis that, if proved correct, will render Roger and his fellow theologians, brokers of the ambiguous sphere of religious belief and interpretation, superfluous: 'What I'm coming to talk to you about,' Dale Kohler announces, 'is God as a *fact*, a fact about to burst upon us, right up out of Nature.'²⁰ In Hawthorne's text, Roger Chillingworth destroys a man of faith who had usurped his sexual status. By contrast, Updike's Roger, who believes that the *parvenu* pietist Dale is also conducting an affair with his wife, Esther, faces intellectual, as well as erotic obsolescence by the endeavours of his rival.

Dale Kohler is the novelist's second re-vision of Arthur Dimmesdale subsequent to the Rev Thomas Marshfield, the earthy but rather pompous Barthian narrator of *A Month of Sundays*. This [Dimmes]Dale inherits a similar spiritual intensity to Marshfield (and, we are led to believe, a more than equal sexual athleticism) but his confidence that Christianity might be vindicated by a modernist recuperation of natural theology inverts his predecessor's insistence on a God who is necessarily wholly other.

Schiff observes that, whilst this sober postgraduate gains his Christian name from Hawthorne's tortured minister, his family name is 'apparently' derived from a Jewish scholar, 'Kaufman Kohler, one of the most influential theologians of Reform Judaism in America' whose 'quest for the reconciliation of traditional faith with modern knowledge is one shared by' Updike's

character.²¹ This delicate intertextual overlapping of borrowed Christian and Jewish identities typifies a novel that seems simultaneously to fear and celebrate the loss of clearly defined boundaries from contemporary America. In a reading of the novel more dependent on Updike's fondness for Roland Barthes than his engagement with Karl Barth, John Duvall views this unstable 'play of difference[s]' as a means of exploring the connection between the theological and the sexual.²² However, the assured distinctions between such cultural binaries as science and religion, student and professor, orthodoxy and heresy are continuously pressurised in the narrative suggesting a radical instability. For example, though Dale's search for divine proof of God's existence places him in the Enlightenment tradition, he is also a confessional Christian who uses Evangelical language and tells Roger that Christ is his 'saviour'. Lambert is another lapsed minister (in a sense the figure of Dimmesdale is split between Dale and Roger – Roger, like Hawthorne's minister, is guilty of adultery both within the novel and in the years before the narrative). Updike continually collapses the boundaries between the two men, both erotically and theologically.

Dale seeks Lambert's support for a research proposal that will 'demonstrate from existing physical and biological data, through the use of models and manipulations on the electronic digital computer, the existence of God, i.e. of a purposive and determining intelligence behind all phenomena' (*RV*, pp. 75-6). Roger, by contrast, echoes Marshfield, in that he is a Barthian believer, who cherishes the notion of a God who is 'wholly other'. Appalled by Dale's project he propounds Barth's theology of revelation and insists that the scientist's proof-hungry nature is heretical as it ignores the

God Who acts, Who *comes to us*, in Revelation and Redemption, and not one Who set the universe going and then hid. The God we care about in this divinity school is the living God, who moves toward us out of His will and love, and Who laughs at all the towers of Babel we build to Him (*RV*, p. 22).

Karl Barth's crisis theology, the neo-orthodoxy that stresses the 'wholly other' nature of God, has long been recognised as a key animating influence in Updike's work, with *Roger's Version*, in particular, read as a fictional apologia for the Barthian critique of natural theology and a fierce vindication of his opposition to the liberal tradition.²³ The novel is prefaced by four epigraphs including a quotation from Barth's 1956 lecture, 'The Humanity of God'. Although critics rightly note the neo-orthodox flavour of Roger's religion, and its close proximity to Updike's Barthian tendencies, there is a too easy conflation of this theological rogue with his creator. As such, although Lambert's status as an unreliable and manipulative narrator is acknowledged, the consistency of his theological arguments has rarely been challenged. The rather radical misuse of Barth's ideas undertaken by Roger Lambert is rarely observed; he is an eloquent apologist for Barthian theology but, in practice, a very bad Barthian. I want to argue that the novel is in conversation with Barth's neo-orthodoxy as much as it is a re-writing of *The Scarlet Letter*.

The novelist as heretic

When read in isolation and in ignorance of the lecture/essay from which it was taken, Barth's epigraph merely amplifies the novel's sense of despair at what Roger calls 'the tower of Babel' of human effort to reach God: 'What if the result of the new hymn to the majesty of God should be a new confirmation of the hopelessness of all human activity?' The question, when torn loose from its context in epigraph form, as all epigraphs must be, appears to be both rhetorical and foreclosed. In the original text, it is neither, and the answer that Barth supplies does not conform to expectations:

What if it should issue in a new justification of the autonomy of man and thus of secularism in the sense of the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms? . . . God forbid! We did not believe nor intend any such thing.²⁴

The 'what if' of Barth's interrogative is a kind of starting point for *Roger's Version*. (Indeed, the 'what if' is a question with which all fiction must begin).²⁵ In this instance it asks: if all human effort is 'hopeless' why commit to any activity beyond one's selfish lusts? Yet, Barth insists, the 'new hymn to the majesty of God' was intended to engender worship, new understanding and belief in the redemptive work of Christ, not despair. It is difficult to believe that Updike was not aware of the counterintuitive conclusion to Barth's spiritual query. In a sense, the novelist acts as a kind of heretic in transforming the implications of the original textual source; interpretation, with its necessary occlusions and omissions, becomes heresy.

Roger mocks Dale for his attempt to seek theological certainty. His desire to take 'the kingdom of heaven by force' as the narrator, quoting Barth, comments, is indeed contrary to the Christian tradition on the virtues of sightless faith. Roger's meditation on Barth's claim in 'The Problem of Ethics' that '[t]he god who stood at the end of some human way . . . would not be God' resonates with a belief in grace but is used merely as a way of dismissing a rival interpreter; it becomes intellectual capital, rather than spiritual encouragement.

'The Humanity of God' represented a reappraisal of Barth's rather austere crisis theology. Although the essay maintains the majesty and mystery of God as '*deity* – a God absolutely unique in His relation to man and the world, overpoweringly lofty and distant, strange, yes even wholly other', it also marks a recuperation of incarnational Christology. Barth repents, in part, for the implication of earlier theology that culture, all that is created by fallen humanity, is necessarily hopeless:

All this, however well it may have been meant and however much it may have mattered, was nevertheless said somewhat severely and brutally, and moreover – at least according to the other side – in part heretically. How we cleared things away! And we did almost nothing but clear things away!²⁶

Roger's contempt for humanity, his repudiation of all effort to transcend the sinful nature as a 'tower of Babel' echoes Barth's analysis of the limits of his early work. He is a gleefully iconoclastic Protestant who is happy to 'clear

things away' without the need to reconstruct belief. Lambert justifies a certain lofty contempt – for Dale, for his niece, and for the wider world – via his use of Barth. 'The Humanity of God', however, emphasises that God's intended relation to man is defined by communion and creativity: 'He does not despise men, but in an inconceivable manner esteems them highly just as they are, takes them into His heart and sets Himself in their place.'²⁷ Furthermore, he insists that participation in the body of believers, as perverted and spiritually barren as it might be, is vital to a true Christian understanding of the 'humanity of God': 'The Lord's Prayer is a *we*-prayer and only in this way also an *I*-prayer. "We" are the Church.'²⁸ Dale, in his awkward missionary fervour, embodies a faint '*we*-prayer'. Roger, the lapsed minister, who rejects community and communion, evades this kind of incarnational Christianity. Although Dale's rather dubious natural theology marks him out as a likely villain in Updike's world, he might, to Roger's horror, unconsciously be the more authentic Barthian of the novel. Roger professes admiration for Barth, and is able to quote him, but uses the theology as an excuse to evade commitment and engagement with the world. Dale's wrestling with the big questions, those Tillichian questions of 'ultimate concern', that for the too content Roger have merely become academic conundrums, marks him of the two men as the more theologically serious. Wood's argument that the novel sets up a theological debate with a predetermined conclusion would have more credibility if Dale were a less articulate exponent of his faith position. His project might verge on the heretical but he takes both good and evil far more seriously than Roger and, in his attempt to engender belief and integrity, he echoes Barth's vision in 'The Humanity of God':

man is *not* good but rather a downright monster. But even if one were in this respect the most melancholy skeptic, one could not . . . say that culture speaks only of the evil in man.²⁹

Creativity, ideas, and the pursuit of God, might be fatally compromised, but, in Barth's terms, this 'attempt of man to be man and thus to hold the good gift of his humanity in honor and put it to work' is inevitable.³⁰ Dale seeks to 'hold the good gift' where Roger holds it in contempt.

The sexual connections between these two 'heretics', as between Chillingworth and Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*, is the occasion for theological exploration. John Duvall has read the novel in terms of its metaphorical conflation of heresy with pornography, the twin illegitimate fixations of Lambert, and connects these non-official forms of discourse with a homo-erotic subtext.³¹ For Schiff, the novelist 'endeavours to transform the *Scarlet Letter* myth by affirming corporeal impulse and thus reconciling body and soul.'³² *Roger's Version* certainly confronts the chaotically incarnate aspects of life, with unruly desire and adulterous couplings represented in such repugnant detail that some critics have decried the novelist's descent into a kind of exclusive, theologically literate pornography. Shortly after publication, Frederick Crews observed, of one of Roger's graphic reveries on Esther and Dale's frantic infidelity, that 'we scarcely know whether we are

supposed to read the scene or rent it'.³³ In 2003, the mainstream Evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, reflected, in an otherwise appreciative piece on the author's achievement that

some of his novels . . . seem only thinly disguised excuses to parade the gaudy excesses of America's sexual fetishes. Even when you know he's up to something else – that his sexual explicitness has a cultural critique, even a theological agenda, behind it – it's pretty hard to stomach.³⁴

Updike's fiction has long been informed, perhaps even over-determined, by a fascination with the relationship between sexuality and religious belief. In his critical prose Updike has written of his two great, opposing theological heroes' perceptions of sexuality, including Tillich's alleged multiple infidelity and predilection for pornography and Barth's surprisingly liberal views of infidelity.³⁵ In a sense both of these emerge in the figure Roger Chillingworth. Can Roger be said to pursue Barth's advice to 'undertake an active opposition to this disorder, and to secure bridgeheads within the confusion'?³⁶ He seems to recognize himself as a transgressor only in so far as his infidelity is a pleasingly illustrative echo of the heretical texts that dominate his professional life. Late in the narrative, after he has finally had sex with his niece, Verna, one of three Pearl figures in the narrative, Lambert confesses:

. . . in my sensation of peace post-coitum, of sweet theistic certainty beneath the remote vague ceiling, of living proof at Verna's side, I was guilty of the heresy of which the Cathars and Fraticelli were long ago accused amid the thunders of anathema – that of committing deliberate abominations so as to widen and deepen the field in which God's forgiveness can magnificently play. *Mas, mas. But thou shall not tempt the Lord thy God* (RV, p. 289).

There is no repentance on Roger's behalf, merely a playful reflection with a theological tradition of devout heretics that, consciously or not, signals moral and spiritual self-satisfaction. God might be 'wholly other' for Roger but this is merely because a Barthian transcendence assures him that he might pursue hedonistic pleasure without the need to recognize the incarnational value of other people: Verna becomes a sexual target to conquer, Esther an erotic figure to please the idolatrous eye and Dale an enemy to vanquish.

The opening words of *Roger's Version* ('I HAVE been happy at the Divinity School') introduce its religiously inflected spatial setting and adumbrate the rather smug theological complacency of the narrator. Both are crucial to Updike's exploration of heresy and its antagonistic but inextricable relationship with Christianity in its mutating historical self-definitions. Updike's temporal shifting of Hawthorne's original to the 1980s is balanced by his preservation of its Boston setting; though the name of city and University are never made explicit, it is clear that the Divinity School is inspired by the influential faculty at Harvard with its fertile theological history. Roger's reflection that his own fondness for Barthian neo-orthodoxy is contrary to the *Zeitgeist* of 'this liberal seminary dominated by gracefully lapsed Unitarians and Quakers' (RV, p. 27) is a subtle intertextual joke which suggests that Hawthorne, the reluctant inheritor of Puritan guilt, is not the

only New England heretic whose ghost stalks *Roger's Version*.

In 1838, Ralph Waldo Emerson, a vital voice in the so-called American Renaissance, himself a 'gracefully lapsed Unitarian', delivered his notoriously heterodox 'Divinity School Address' to the apprentice clergymen of Harvard, the mid-nineteenth-century predecessors of Roger Lambert's radical generation of students. The affinities and antagonisms between Roger and Emerson are typical of Updike's playfulness: both men, for example, repudiated their 'legislative' positions as Christian ministers in favour of less spiritually responsible and accountable careers as interpreters. Emerson left his Unitarian pastorate in 1832, following his disillusionment with the efficacy of Communion, and became a radical, questing, Romantic experimental essayist. Roger Lambert informs his reader on the novel's first page that he abandoned the 'active ministry' fourteen years ago for a more interpretative career. Emerson is a liberal dissenter in a conservative world; Lambert, a neo-orthodox heretic, with privately libertarian tastes, in a tolerant, consciously heterodox world.

The Relativity of Heresy

Emerson, the visionary Transcendentalist, memorably named elsewhere by Updike as a sort of self-proclaimed 'post-Christian prophet', in Updike's view crucially lacked the debilitating guilt of Hawthorne or Melville, and emphasised the radical discontinuity between the message of Christ and the ossified teachings of the gathered Church.³⁷ Emerson's lecture echoes the devotional fervour of Jonathan Edwards, the eighteenth-century preacher most closely associated with the Christian revivals of the first 'Great Awakening' of the 1740s, and the address makes a similar call for the repudiation of ritual in favour of a new, American spirituality of individual experience. Edwards, like Emerson, was viewed as a threat to the church establishment and banished from his pastorate. In a further echo, Emerson argues, as did Edwards, that divine revelation must and will be uttered by individuals in the contemporary world: 'Men have come to speak of the revelation as somewhat long ago given and done, as if God were dead', laments Emerson.³⁸ Despite the compelling cadences of his revivalist rhetoric and their continuities with the Protestant tradition, Emerson's theology effectively rejected credal Christianity and, like a number of his European Romantic contemporaries, he sought to deify humanity ('If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God') and to challenge the Trinitarian creed of Christ's unique divinity and salvific sacrifice:

Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. . . . But what a distortion did his doctrine and memory suffer in the same, in the next and in the following ages! (*DSA*, pp. 1149, 1151)

Emerson's lecture so incensed the institution and the conservative Christian establishment that the ex-Unitarian minister was publicly decried as a heretic and exiled from Harvard for 30 years. Abhorred by the orthodoxy of his own moment in history, by the end of the twentieth century his immanentist,

mystical and syncretistic arguments have prevailed, suggesting the historical relativity of heresy. Indeed, Dale's attack on the disciplinary vagueness of the current curriculum implies that an Emersonian-style heterodoxy shapes the modern Divinity School:

what you call religion around here is what other people would call sociology. That's how you teach it, right? Everything from the Gospels to *The Golden Bough*, Martin Luther to Martin Luther King, it all happened, it's historical fact, it's anthropology, it's ancient texts, it's humanly *interesting*, right? But that's so safe. How can you go wrong? Not even the worst atheist in the world denies that people have been religious . . . So what? (RV, p. 19).

In a recent article commemorating the bi-centenary of Emerson's birth, Harold Bloom asserts that the writer 'remains the central figure in American culture, as well as our unofficial religion, which I regard as more Emersonian than Christian, despite nearly all received opinion on this matter'.³⁹ Elsewhere, Bloom has described this 'unofficial religion', and particularly its New Age manifestations as an 'endlessly entertaining saturnalia of ill-defined yearnings'.⁴⁰ Both Dale's hunger for absolute scientific assurance for his theism, and Roger's dislike of syncretism, indicate that they are heretics against the eclectic 'postmodern mind' which, as Zygmunt Bauman notes, is 'altogether less excited than its modern adversary by the prospect (let alone moved by the urge) to enclose the world into a grid of neat categories and clear-cut divisions.' The fact that theology has become a form of sociology is indicative of what Bauman further notes is 'the nasty habit of things have of spilling over their definitional boundaries, or even by the premonition that the drawing of such boundaries with any degree of lasting reliability defies human resources'.⁴¹ The heterodox world envisioned by Emerson is inherited by new prophets without honour in the form of Roger and Dale, both seeking the assurance of alternative forms of orthodoxy.

The Divinity School might once have been a legislative arena but now, to appropriate Bauman's formulation, it has become an interpretative space.⁴² Where formerly the school would have trained ministers to preach a comparatively unambiguous (Protestant) gospel, the liberal, secularising forces of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries have transformed it into a discursive space where categories of orthodoxy, theological realism and ethical absolutes are anathema. As Roger laments:

This generation, which by and large has lost all inculturated instinct for the Judaeo-Christian sacral, has displaced much of its religiosity onto anti-pollution, ranging from the demand for smoke-free zones in restaurants to violent demonstrations in front of nuclear-power plants (RV, p. 6).

Debate, political radicalism and a celebration of multi-cultural America define the liberal project of the contemporary Divinity School. In Roger, however, a white, middle-class academic, approximately the same age as Updike, we have a figure who is lost amidst the relativism of the age and who subconsciously grieves the loss of a world of verifiable absolutes and defined hierarchies. Despite Roger's enthusiasm for heresy in its various historical

forms and his libertarian defence of pornography, he is a deeply conservative figure. When confronted with a contemporary heresy in the form of Dale's project, Roger is outraged. However, this indignation in some senses undoes complacency and the novel becomes a sequence of highly charged theological debates, owing something to Oscar Wilde's dialogic essays.

The narrative mediates the encounter between materialist and mystical 'versions' of the world, as modes of interpreting scripture and experience collide and create alternative and destabilising hermeneutic possibilities. Dale Kohler's project, as unlikely and hubristic as it might seem, provokes examination of one's own religious convictions. Should the devout seek to prove God's existence and triumphantly controvert the atheistic assumptions of contemporary science? Can Christianity simultaneously persist as a public, ethical force and as a relational faith tradition in which the self is remade by interaction with God? Certainly his potentially 'blasphemous' project to demonstrate the miraculous force behind all existence contradicts the arguments of both Emerson and Barth, the two diametrically opposed heretical thinkers whose work, in various ways, informs the novel. In the heterodox Divinity School Address, Emerson, in words that seem to prophesy both Dale's project and the marketing of the miraculous by 1980s TV Evangelists refutes the pursuit of the remarkable: 'To aim to convert a man by miracles, is a profanation of the soul' (*DSA*, p. 1151). Barth, from his distinctly non-Emersonian vision of a Deity who is far beyond human sensation and reason, declared in 'The Humanity of God' that the God of the Bible, of revelation and redemption, was 'no universal deity capable of being reached conceptually'. This later argument shapes Roger's view and in a sense the professor of heresy is vindicated. Dale's attempt to reach God 'conceptually' meets with failure: a fleeting image of a hand appears on a computer screen only to fade, a ghostly half-presence, or as Roger names God, 'that tender shadow on the underside of our minds' (*RV*, p. 249). Dale leaves New England, and Roger suggests, abandons his faith, destroyed by the encounter with decadent Boston liberalism and its Puritan ghosts. Yet this troubled avatar of Arthur Dimmesdale is one of the most articulate defenders, in postmodern literature, of a theistic reading of the world:

Materialism is a faith just like theism: only it asks a lot more in the way of miracles. Instead of asking we believe in God it asks we don't believe in ourselves; it asks we don't believe in our own awareness, our own emotions and moral sensations (*RV*, p. 165).

If the reader can make one final leap of faith and trust Roger's undependable, heretical version of events, Dale leaves more than a legacy of anguished faith in New England. Esther, he implies, is pregnant with a child conceived of their supposed affair. Where Arthur Dimmesdale embraced death on the scaffold, Dale's exit from the narrative is coupled with the incarnational hope of new birth.⁴³

Roger's Version, refracted through the self-serving consciousness of a single, morally dubious narrator is no more prescriptive than any other

literary novel of the late twentieth-century. Nonetheless, for all Updike's modernist curbing of omniscient intervention, its narrative demands a theological or atheological response. In a rare moment of spiritual insight and generosity Roger asks of Dale's project: 'What was this desolation in Dale's heart, I thought, but the longing for God – that longing which is, when all is said and done, our only evidence of His existence?' (*RV*, p. 67).

Updike, who might be regarded as either confoundingly orthodox or vertiginously antinomian, depending on one's theological perspective, is fascinated by the abject, aberrant and erotic status of the heretic. Roger and Dale, for example, exist on the peripheries of their own intellectual communities, unable to participate fully in, respectively, the pluralist or atheist-materialist ideologies of liberal divinity or rationalist science.

The novel negotiates with the unofficial history of Christian belief. Believers or atheists, we are all, Updike implies, forced to choose not between eternally fixed orthodoxy and dissent but between a variety of heresies. Theology, he argues in a comparative essay on Barth and Tillich, 'is not a provable accumulation, like science, nor is it a succession of enduring monuments, like art. It must always unravel and be reknit.'⁴⁴

Roger's Version acknowledges the attraction of Puritan absolutism and Transcendentalist optimism, but repudiates both. The legacy of the latter tradition is a key part of contemporary America. Updike, however, cannot share the sanguine Transcendentalist view that the realm of selfhood, so championed by Emerson and Whitman, is the only reliable space for transformative, authentic encounters with the divine. Our only view of interiority in the novel, after all, is that of an unpleasant casuist, who gorges himself on pornographic fantasy.

The evidence of *Roger's Version* is that a religion based purely on subjective criteria is also tragically bound up with a post-lapsarian world; collective, authorized expressions of faith, the '*Cultus*' so abhorred by Emerson, might well engender flaccid and legalistic traditions but the pursuit of a unique spiritual identity is similarly destined to fail. The final set-piece of Roger's narrative sees this master manipulator challenged by his wife who leaves the domestic space to attend church. "Why on earth would you do a ridiculous thing like that?" demands the flustered Roger. "Oh . . . To annoy you." (*RV*, p. 329). Esther's new choice is a kind of heresy, against her own scientific rationalism and Roger's egocentric isolationism, as she seeks out communion and connectedness and, in so doing, confronts the theological complacency of her heresy-obsessed husband. As Evans argues '[h]eresy has been a great shaker-up of complacency' and Roger, though no sudden convert to re-engagement with humanity, has been forced to recognize the costly dynamics of desire and responsibility: he and Esther are the new guardians for Verna's neglected child.⁴⁵

Updike does not write in what one writer of Christian fiction has called the 'major key of faith' but, instead, belongs in the complex, living tradition of American literary heretics. Sherry's view that it 'is difficult to convey the workings of grace in any medium, but the simplest way to start is to imagine

a world without grace' has resonance for Updike's often desolate literary landscape.⁴⁶ His characters might seek transcendence in all the wrong places but many of them, somehow, stumble into what Frederick Buechner calls that 'crazy, holy grace', authored by a God who is both wholly other and intimately caught up in the lives of his creatures.⁴⁷ Desperate and deprived as many of his characters are, Updike's fiction is a space in which grace and forgiveness might, indeed, 'magnificently play' (RV, p. 289).

¹ John Updike, 'Remarks upon receiving the Campion Medal' in *John Updike and Religion: The Sense of the Sacred and the Motions of Grace*, ed. by James Yerkes, Grand Rapids Michigan, Eerdmans, 1999, pp. 3-6 (p.4).

² *Towards a Christian Poetics*, London, Macmillan, 1984, pp. 12-13.

³ David Lodge, for example, has argued that 'narrative literature, and especially the novel' has the capacity to create 'fictional models of what it is like to be a human being, moving through time and space. It captures the density of experienced events by its rhetoric, and it shows the connectedness of events through the device of plot', *Consciousness and the Novel*, London, Secker and Warburg, 2002, p.14. Patrick Sherry, using François Mauriac as his example, suggests that the novel is 'the ideal medium' to explore metaphysical questions 'because it can capture the nature of unseen movements and processes that are worked out only gradually in human lives, and because of its capacity to convey psychological truth', 'The Novel' in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought: Intellectual, Spiritual and Moral Horizons of Christianity*, ed. by Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 489-91 (p. 490).

⁴ Sherry, p.490.

⁵ John W. Aldridge described this alleged absence of ideas as 'the Private Vice of John Updike', *Time to Murder and Create: the Contemporary Novel in Crisis*, New York, McKay, 1966. Essay reprinted in *John Updike: Modern Critical Reviews*, ed. by Harold Bloom, New York, Chelsea House, 1987, pp. 9-13 (p.13).

⁶ Updike, 'Remarks upon receiving the Campion Medal', p.3.

⁷ G. R. Evans, *A Brief History of Heresy*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2003, p.164.

⁸ 'Religion and Literature' in *The Religion Factor: an Introduction to How Religion Matters*, ed. by William Scott Green and Jacob Neusner, Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, pp. 227-41 (p. 238).

⁹ Wood's essay, 'John Updike's Complacent God', is the most eloquent, if rather one-sided, attack on the novelist's credentials as a writer of genuine spiritual force, *The Broken Estate: Essays in Literature and Belief*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1999, p. 227.

¹⁰ *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996, p. 340. Jeffrey places Updike in a tradition of twentieth-century writers, including Wallace Stevens and John Cheever, who sceptically disavow Puritanism. He argues that the Puritan legacy re-emerges most dynamically in the Southern writing of Flannery O'Connor and Wendell Berry.

¹¹ James Yerkes, 'As Good as it Gets: the Religious Consciousness in John Updike's Literary Vision', in Yerkes, pp. 9-30 (p.10).

¹² Evans, xv.

¹³ 'Body and Soul: John Updike and *The Scarlet Letter*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 15.4 (1989), pp. 475-95 (p. 478).

¹⁴ 'Hawthorne's Creed', in *Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism by John Updike*,

- Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, pp. 73, 76. See Greiner's commentary on this essay, pp. 476-7.
- ¹⁵ J. Todd Billings, 'John Updike as Theologian of Culture: *Roger's Version* and the Possibility of Embodied Redemption', *Christianity and Literature*, 52.2 (2003), pp. 203-213 (p. 203).
- ¹⁶ 'Hawthorne's Creed', pp. 76-7. See also Greiner (1990), p. 477.
- ¹⁷ Schiff, *Updike's Version: Rewriting the Scarlet Letter*, Columbia and London, University of Missouri Press, 1992, p. 9.
- ¹⁸ *Literary Theory: An introduction*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. 12.
- ¹⁹ 'Hawthorne's Creed', p. 78.
- ²⁰ John Updike, *Roger's Version*, London, Penguin, 1987, p. 19. All subsequent references to the novel will be given as *RV*, followed by page numbers.
- ²¹ Schiff (1992), p. 61.
- ²² John N. Duvall, 'The Pleasure of Textual/Sexual Wrestling: Pornography and Heresy in *Roger's Version*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 37. 1 (1991), pp. 81-95 (p. 82).
- ²³ The most comprehensive study of Updike's Barthian qualities is Stephen H. Webb's 'Writing as a Reader of Karl Barth: What kind of Religious Writer is John Updike Not?' in Yerkes (1999), pp. 145-61. Frederick Crews' essay, 'Mr. Updike's Planet', *The New York Review of Books*, 4 December 1986, 33. 19, pp. 7-14 (p. 14), offers an illuminating engagement with the influence of Barth on Updike, pp. 7-14. See also Greiner (1990).
- ²⁴ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1976.
- ²⁵ For James Wood (1999) all fiction begins with a belief in the 'as if', xv.
- ²⁶ Barth, p. 43.
- ²⁷ Barth, p. 51.
- ²⁸ Barth, p. 63.
- ²⁹ Barth, p. 54.
- ³⁰ Barth, p. 54.
- ³¹ Duvall, p. 84.
- ³² Schiff (1992), p. 10. See also Greiner (1990).
- ³³ See, in particular, Frederick Crews' influential and acute review essay on *Roger's Version*, cited in note 23 above.
- ³⁴ Mark A. Buchanan, 'Rabbit Trails to God', *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/007/4.42.html>
- ³⁵ 'To the Tram Halt Together', review of books on Paul Tillich and Karl Barth, included in Hugging the Shore, pp. 825- 36.
- ³⁶ Updike, 'To the Tram Halt Together', p. 828. Updike is quoting from Barth's 'Man and Woman' in *Church Dogmatics III/4*.
- ³⁷ Updike, 'Hawthorne's Creed', p. 75.
- ³⁸ *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. by Baym et al, 6th edn, 5 vols, New York, Norton, 2003, pp. 1148-59 (p. 1153). All subsequent references will be given in the text as *DSA*, followed by page number.
- ³⁹ 'The Sage of Concord', *The Guardian*, 24 May 2003, pp. 4-6 (p.4).
- ⁴⁰ *Omens of Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection*, London, Fourth Estate, 1996, p.18. Also quoted by Michael York, 'New Age Commodification and Appropriation of Spirituality', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 16.3 (2001), 361-72.
- ⁴¹ Zygmunt Bauman, 'Postmodern Religion?', in *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, edited by Paul Heelas, with David Martin and Paul Morris, Oxford, Blackwell, 1998, pp. 55-78 (p. 57).

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⁴² *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. 1-24.

⁴³ Greiner (1990) argues that in this child 'Updike concludes the essay not with praise of the head but with hope for the soul', p. 481.

⁴⁴ Updike, 'To the Tram Halt Together', p. 835.

⁴⁵ Evans, p.165.

⁴⁶ Sherry, p. 490.

⁴⁷ Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey: a memoir of early days*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1982, p.46.

The Comforter

'I am assigned, wherever you may go,
to be your servant and your enemy,
the measure of your gifts for good or ill,
your grief, your fear, your hopelessness, but still
your comfort, though you may not care to know
or honour me.

Men rack their lives for whispers of success
and in the consequence discover them
false, broken promises that wound their peace.
Prisoned in will, they fret for their release;
I visit them, and from their weariness
deliver them.

"Achievement" is their faith – the word implies
the toil of self to build a cave of air;
leave that illusion in a midnight wood,
repair to light, construct a quietude,
and listen, while I teach a way that lies
out of despair.

Your time is short, under a cooling sun,
to use the talent set aside for you;
begin a betterment, invest your days
in love's increase, in wonderment and praise,
and live for me, as I am sent by One
who died for you.'

Walter Nash

Reviews

Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés (eds.) *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2002, 215pp., £25.00

The five articles that make up this collection (six, if you include Homi Bhabha's substantial Afterword) do 'what it says on the cover'. This is a genuine dialogue between some of the leading figures in historical literary studies. Although the heyday of new historicism is long past, the influence of the historical turn is evident in British universities today in its pedagogical emphasis upon contextualisation. This volume therefore offers a timely and valuable reassessment of what it means to have any kind of commitment to an historical method of reading literary texts. Pertinently, it challenges the literary world's engagement with history and historicism, bringing a vast amount of historical methodology and research into play with the more dominant literary theories. The essays by Marshall Brown and Mario Valdés (which look at the historical practice itself as influenced by Foucault, and the interplay between literature and history respectively) take the issues provoked by converging history and literature to their most basic and deeply philosophical levels that are beyond most previous attempts to theorise historical practices in literary studies. Valdés interestingly asks the question pertinent to our current age of increased interdisciplinarity: 'is literary history, history?' and provokes the question: how qualified are we in historical methods, as literature academics? If we are feeling in any way inadequate, this book is certainly the place to start, not least for its impressive footnotes that point the reader towards swathes of further reading.

However, the main thrust of the book is concerned with literary histories as national allegories: those mammoth enterprises that try to narrate the evolution of literature in an entire area – Ireland, America, South-East Asia, for example. The volume in fact pre-empts two such projects (the forthcoming *Oxford Comparative History of Latin American Literary Cultures* and the *Comparative History of East-Central European Literary Cultures: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*) and reflects theoretically and critically upon them. The problem the book as a whole is trying to tackle is the question: If the national model is problematic because of its 'uncritical acceptance of Eurocentric ideologies', how can ex-colonised countries narrate an authentic identity? These questions of course also impact upon the university curriculum and identity (as English Studies has changed from being rigidly about England's writing to signifying all literatures in the English language) and the question of the canon.

The book presents vastly differing, but all sophisticated, arguments, that force the reader to grapple with the nuances of the philosophical problems. Hutcheon's essay questions the poststructuralist deconstruction of teleological, national narratives, arguing that 'dismantling is the luxury of the already established and the already articulated' (p. 9), a contention that unfortunately is never conclusively argued. In fact it is blown apart by her own, passing observation that 'today's progressive intentions can become tomorrow's tyrannies' (p. 14). Hutcheon's position is then countered by Greenblatt's pithy, even brusque,

response that argues unequivocally against what others may see as ‘necessary fictions’. He presents five reasons: because national ‘fictions’ are opportunistic; because performativity may be enforced rather than offered as a strategic fiction; that it repeats the colonial model; it denies multiple identities; and finally, its methodology reiterates organic theories of history, denying what he calls ‘the need for rupture’. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Greenblatt’s essay is his countering of the Foucauldian concept of epistemes, arguing that ‘we need more a sharp awareness of accidental judgements than a theory of the organic’ (p. 61). The final essay in the volume by Walter D. Mignolo is a lucid engagement with the position of literature in the postcolonial world. His aim is to rethink ‘the complicity between literature, history, and alphabetic writing in Western culture’ (p. 162). He traces the imposition of Western concepts of ‘Literature’ upon the then devalued ‘literature’ of colonial people and develops a strategy of how this taxonomic dependence can be broken. His conclusion is that ex-colonised countries’ dependence upon Western conceptualizations is unavoidable and ingrained, but that ‘decolonization’ involves privileging the third world perspective and deconstructing Western narratives.

Although genuinely dialogical (each writer engages with the essays that surround in more than a superficial manner), all the writers share a commitment to a way of reading that is above all else ethical. This results from their shared view that literature (and theorising on literature – the focus of this book) is a site of power. As Hutcheon states: ‘How we think about the culture of the past cannot be separated from how we act in the present’ (p.4). Although grappling with poststructuralism, this volume demonstrates the return to reason as a base upon which ethical readings may be posited, a response to the much-cited dangers of deconstructing history entirely (tellingly, Paul de Man is a much-cited figure). Valdés’ essay, for example, presents an apologetics of history that argues for narrative as the ‘natural’ framework for experience. Following Ricoeur he sees humans as beings in time that cannot escape the framework of past, present, future and thus narrative and history (in its narrowest sense) become foundations upon which the study of literature and literary histories can happily sit.

The book’s indirect engagement with Lyotard’s “incredulity towards metanarratives” (and their Eurocentric character) and its occasional return to the metanarratives of time, ethics and experience may appear contradictory. The resolution that the book offers, and that Bhabha highlights explicitly in his Afterword, is the imperative of dialogue. In short, in this book the medium is the message. The essays interrelate and disagree but present a way of talking about literature and history, and importantly literary histories, that is never closed and finalised, and that gestures towards patterns and possible resolutions without staking any grand claims. A thorough scholarly approach sits alongside humility in an attempt to reach a more ethically responsible way of narrating literature historically. Although my own work on identity construction in narrative is not obviously related to this volume, I found all of the debates impacted on my work to some degree. For anyone interested in historical approaches to literature, especially in a postcolonial theoretical context, this collection is surely indispensable.

Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene & Karl Möller (eds.) *Renewing Biblical Interpretation Vol 1*, (Zondervan, 2000) Paternoster, 2001, 400 pp., £19.99

This is the first of eight volumes to arise from the Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar, a ten-year project headed by Craig Bartholomew, involving the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education and the British and Foreign Bible Society. It assesses, in contributions by eighteen scholars from various disciplines, the current state of Biblical interpretation and explores new ways forward, considering historical, literary and theological approaches.

Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, Karl Möller and John Riches consider how successive philosophies underpinning academic disciplines have led to the marginalization of the Bible in the West. Reason has been valued above revelation, scepticism encouraged as tolerant, a largely ethical understanding of the Gospel adopted, and a myth of progress away from theology to science assumed.

From the mid-nineteenth century until recently, historical criticism has dominated Biblical interpretation, supposedly offering objectivity; but its contingencies and probabilities led to scepticism until the Jesus of history gave way to the Christ of faith for those interested. Lacking a literary perspective, it abandoned the texts as we have them in favour of fragments of inaccessible supposed sources.

Postmodernism with its preference for phenomenology has challenged the idea of any universal perspective, in favour of a multiplicity of self-constructed perceptions of the past and incompatible interpretations of texts. Though we see the clarity and ambiguities of Scripture 'through a glass darkly', we need to distinguish readings which nourish from those that stunt life and destroy faith (Walter Sundberg).

Interpretation from the points of view of language and literature

Neil B MacDonald values the philosophy of language in Biblical interpretation, especially in relation to typology 'based on the presupposition that the whole Old Testament looks beyond itself for its interpretation'. He discusses Adam-Christ typology, which was not part of the author's intention, in this light, concluding that what is in fact true in a statement does not depend on what is meant.

Brian Ingrassia considers the crisis of interpretation identified in the Postmodern Bible (Yale, 1995): whose reading of the text counts? Postmodern theory suspects interpretation as power play. It has, however, insisted that it is always based on presupposition. Various interpretations of the Tower of Babel narrative illustrate this. Ironically, as Anthony Thistleton observes, in rejecting Biblical theology it relies uncritically on the modern ontotheological tradition it deconstructs, instead of distinguishing the god of the philosophers from the God of Christian revelation, so laying itself open to deconstruction.

Trevor Hart points out that we practise interpretation in all our

communications. Because of our different perspectives and because ‘every utterance is to be understood only via the whole life to which it belongs’ (Schleiermacher), this is difficult. We are unique, but language is a common currency and requires imaginative understanding. This is involved in loving our neighbour as ourselves.

The level of imagining (and good judgement, taking into account the whole Bible – Nicholas Woltersdorff) will vary with different genres. Hart gives examples of interpretations of ‘some troublesome words of Paul . . . that demand a high level of imaginative activity from an exegete,’ establishing one as part of the development of a theme running through the epistle. (Collingwood has argued that historical understanding also requires imagination.)

Hart speaks of our engaging with otherness and widening our horizons, as happens in reading imaginative literature. Stephen I. Wright, reflecting on Lewis’s *An Experiment in Criticism*, agrees that being receptive to a good literary text, including the Bible, can change our whole consciousness. Subjecting the Bible to critical scrutiny under the authority of the reader is an unrewarding alternative.

Three Theological Ways Forward

Al Wolters proposes that, since undetected presuppositions affect our perceptions, and knowledge is not easily separated from belief, ‘confessional criticism’, scholarly analysis rooted in the classical Christian confession of Scripture as the Word of God, is valid. His proposal also takes into account the actual work of the Biblical scholar.

He applies to Zechariah 4, freshly translated, nine levels of Biblical interpretation, the first seven generally accepted, the final two not, being theological. These are redemptive-historical analysis, and confessional discernment. They locate the text in the whole narrative of the canon, and consider it as God’s word addressed to readers today. The levels influence each other in both directions, consolidating the case for including them. The bottom up (starting with textual criticism) works with the traditional, the familiar; the top down challenges these with fresh insights. A reading of the nine levels is given.

Rex Mason adds the history of exegesis, to make understandable ‘the frankly awful things in the Bible’, recognizing its confessional nature, and that ‘its local cultural context’, challenged in other parts of the Scriptures, is not germane to its message.

In *The New Testament and the People of God*, N T Wright aims to provide a critical-realist account of early Christianity, ‘realism subject to critique’, knowledge being subject to ‘the grid of one’s worldview’. Thorsten Moritz assesses how well Wright has integrated the strengths of both positivism and phenomenalism.

He identifies as new thinking Wright’s view that ‘narrative is the most characteristic way in which human beings view reality’ and that ‘the telling of stories in the Bible has among its aims forming, confirming, challenging,

subverting, reshaping worldviews. He considers 'storied knowledge' the only knowledge there is, untranslatable into 'propositional truth'. The stories concerned are those behind the author, the text, the reader, and the interpreter. He applies this framework to first century Judaism and its stories, including the gospels. He thinks such an approach could also be applied to literature and history, and argues for a hermeneutic that integrates all three.

Moritz describes *The New Testament and the People of God* as indispensable reading for Biblical scholars, and concludes that 'it is difficult to see how any attempt to renew Biblical interpretation could bypass his proposals.'

Harry Daniel Beeby advocates a 'missional' reading of the Bible in the academy to fulfil the Church's mission, which is the same as God's, that the kingdoms of this world should become the Kingdom of Christ. This is the alternative to being influenced by the critical view of a culture that prefers a personal belief within a privatised church. He suggests practical remedies.

Read as scripture, the Bible 'carries the whole story that is necessary for all humankind at all times, hence its variety, ambivalence, paradoxes, within its overall unity. It answers the recurrent questions of life.'

Walter Brueggemann's 'First Retrospect on the Consultation' concludes with the question: What difference does this make to the way we live?

In his Foreword Brevard Childs notes that, among the many conflicting voices on interpretation outside the church, discussion often relates to Biblical texts, an 'unexpressed consensus that the Bible still possesses a seriousness of content and an evocative power for raising basic questions', which offers hope in a search for its renewed understanding in the 21st century.

This book would be rewarding reading to many besides Biblical scholars. It has breadth of interest and depth of insight. It embodies unique visions for transforming Biblical interpretation and good news in a crisis that affects culture and society as a whole. It has a clear introduction and an intriguing cover design that invites interpretation.

Margaret Helps

Rosemary A Nixon, *The Message of Jonah*, IVP, 2003, 219pp., £8.99 pb.

To many, Jonah is known only by his whale. Endless questions have been asked about its authenticity. But here, the author insists, is a book which challenges us with questions of far greater importance. She sees the book as 'theological truth distilled from historical reality' (p. 34), a 'prophet's personal experience interpreted theologically by means of parable' (p. 45). She splendidly unfolds the strands of its detailed message, exposing truth most relevant to today's reader.

The great theme of Jonah's book is God's amazing and profound love, not only for his covenant people (including a disobedient prophet like Jonah) but also for his unbelieving people in a city like Nineveh, to go to

which is like 'going to hell' (p. 63). So we are challenged e.g. about our attitudes in today's multi-faith society, and about our often rigid hold on orthodoxy which can prevent us loving the unorthodox, especially when God acts in what we consider an unorthodox way. Jonah was 'a comfortable believer' (p. 178), unwilling to face up to uncomfortable truth. His book asks 'What do you care for most?' God cares most for the lost souls of a place like Nineveh (Jonah 4:16).

A welcome addition to the Bible Speaks Today series.

Keith Weston

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Rupert Shortt, Rowan Williams. *An Introduction*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003, 133pp., endnotes, index of names, £7.95 pb.

This brief introduction to the recently appointed Archbishop of Canterbury is written by the Religion Editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*. A former student of Rowan Williams, Shortt clearly has an inside track on many aspects of the Archbishop's life and interests. He has written a highly interesting and readable account which helps enormously in getting a feel for the character, personality, theological orientation and concerns of one who is bound to be a major player in the public and ecclesiastical life not only of the UK but also wherever the Anglican Communion is numerous and significant.

The book is divided into four chapters of unequal length. Chapter 1 is by far the longest and traces the origins and development of Rowan Williams from his birth and upbringing in the area of Swansea, to university successes in both Oxford and Cambridge, on into his elevation to leadership in the Anglican church, first back in Wales and then Canterbury. This is the heart of the book and provides a very helpful narrative of Williams's life, explaining exactly why the new Archbishop is held in such affection and admiration by so many people. This is a man from an essentially ordinary home background who by dint of outstanding intellectual prowess has managed, apparently fairly effortlessly, to aspire to the very highest positions, culminating in his appointment to the Lady Margaret chair of Divinity in the University of Oxford. Shortt traces the theological and political concerns in evidence from his subject's earliest years. We never get the feeling that these were simply abstract concerns. Theological interests are accompanied by a consistent concern for spirituality and right Christian holiness; socio-political concerns are matched by a readiness to get his hands dirty both in terms of action and polemics. Williams is clearly interested in people as well as theology and church.

Perhaps most significantly for many, Shortt traces Williams's involvement in the Liberal Catholic umbrella movement, Affirming Catholicism, and in the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. The former movement meant that, a decade ago, he supported the measure to ordain

women clergy; the latter is consistent with subsequent ordaining of a gay clergyman. Alongside of this, however, his loyalty to church decisions and his concern for the unity and inclusiveness of the church emerges as unimpeachable.

The chronological organisation of this first chapter points up the fact that, since its writing, events in New Hampshire, NEAC4 and the Iraq War, which he opposed, and its aftermath, have subsequently added further complexity to Williams's life. It is in the nature of these things that such a chapter will quickly be overtaken by events. This does not, however, detract from its value.

The second chapter offers a presentation of Williams's philosophical and theological thinking. This derives not so much from abstract propositions but, in the manner of the later Wittgenstein, whom he admires, from dialogue and conversation. This is deeply rooted also in Williams's thoroughly trinitarian concerns. Relationship and community are consistently preferred to system, and art and the imagination are deemed important. Readers of *The Glass* will be encouraged that Williams is not only a theologian and churchman but a poet and able musician. And once again praxis is prioritised. This sometimes difficult and dense writer subscribes to the view that he didn't really become a theologian until he became a bishop and had to embrace and listen to the full gamut of voices within his own communion. His ability always to find the best in people whilst remaining penetratingly critical emerges frequently in Shortt's account.

Chapter three focuses upon Williams's spirituality, grounded not only in a deep attachment to scripture and his own tradition, but in rather eclectic reading in the desert fathers, St John of the Cross and iconography. He has published in all of these areas. The new archbishop is no proponent of easy spirituality or cheap grace. 'He sees complacency and acquisitiveness all around, and a carelessness about the language of faith among Christians that provides endless scope for self-delusion and spiritual infantilism' (p. 102). Finally chapter four engages with the political side of Williams's concerns. In this he is no expert and has taken some hard blows. Is he a dabbler who is ignorant of the concrete realities of *Realpolitik*, or simply a church leader who is calling others to broader general perspectives? Certainly his starting position is left wing Old Labour, but even this is rooted in his theological commitment to trinity and community, which he believes leads naturally to the socialist agenda. In this he is more redemptionist than incarnationist. He sees a need for things to change. And he is critical of the employment of market forces in health and education, and questioning of wealth creation schemes and globalisation. Is he simply skirting around uncomfortable issues?

This is a helpful book. Some of it was familiar to me and will be familiar probably to many reasonably informed Christians. And some of it is rather uncritical. Shortt doesn't explore the controversial elements of Williams's appointment to Canterbury, and clearly sees no reason to explore the response of evangelicals in any depth. Nor is there any deep engagement with his major theological output such as his work on Arius, or the

resurrection. This is, however, a very useful introduction to the thought and character of a man who will be important to many of us for some years to come.

Robert Willoughby

Jean Verdon, *Night in the Middle Ages*, translated by George Holoch, University of Notre Dame Press, 2002, \$25.00 paper and \$45.00 cloth, 0-268-03656-X

Verdon's study of night in the Middle Ages is divided into three parts – 'Satan or Horrific Night', 'Man or Night Tamed' and 'God or Sublime Light'. This attribution of aspects of night to Satan, Man and God is symbolic: the 'Satan' part gathers together evidence about bad things that happen at night, the section designated 'Man' deals with the social history of time, sleep and work, and the part ascribed to 'God' discusses the role of night in religious practices and discourses. Verdon's own attitude to night seems somewhat contradictory: on the one hand, as his closing pages reveal, he is inclined towards an allegorical view of night as sinful and sinister, yet on the other hand, as a historian of *mentalités*, he is required to be dispassionately realistic about the fact that, for example, bad things happen during the day as well as at night.

The sources Verdon uses vary in accordance with this subdivision into three parts: the first part is dominated by legal testimonies, the second by secular texts and the material historical record, and the third by didactic and monastic works. The source texts relate almost exclusively to France in the period 1200-1500, although some patristic and early medieval authorities are cited. Citations from fictional texts are peppered throughout the book, but are read as straightforwardly evidential statements of fact; nowhere is there any acknowledgement of the dictates of genre or the possibility of irony. The absence of any sense of literary method, tradition or strategy is most evident in Verdon's discussion of the *fabliau*, a subject given ground-breaking treatment in R. Howard Bloch's *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (University of Chicago Press, 1986). Bloch revealed the *fabliau*, with its scatological humour and often adulterous subject matter, to be a sophisticated and self-critical literary form, whereas Verdon seems to take all tales of nocturnal bed-hopping as indicative of either the perfidy of women or the inherent dangerousness of night, or both. Verdon's handling of legal evidence is similarly uncritical; the reader is not alerted to the fact that context, bias and contingency must all be addressed when assessing such evidence. One example stands out. The statement of a woman presumably accused of witchcraft (Verdon simply designates her 'a witch') begins thus: 'Very unhappy that her husband beat her, she went off at night into a wood on a rock and began crying out to God or the devil to help her'

(p.60). In the rest of her statement/confession (neither the species of the text nor its context is made clear) the woman describes how Satan offered to stop the violence she suffered if he paid her homage, and how she met with other women in an 'assembly' that practised various diabolical activities including eating dead children. In the past three decades since Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) the social history of European witchcraft has been exhaustively researched, and even the most cursory acquaintance with this body of scholarship alerts one to the domestic abuse and patriarchal suspicion of female society and practices (such as midwifery) that underlie this story. Verdon identifies none of these complicating factors in the incident. *Night in the Middle Ages* is also written without footnotes, which makes it impossible for the reader to ascertain which of the many primary sources in the bibliography provided a particular anecdote.

Verdon exhibits a significant blind spot where questions of gender and gender relations are concerned. Indeed, his tone is complacently patriarchal. This fatally compromises his study and leads to the profoundly misogynistic conclusion that 'woman and night are linked together' (p. 45, reiterated on p. 217). Sadly, this belief underpins the whole book. Adultery is the domain of the stereotypical lustful wife, never the husband (who is imagined, in one notable example, shivering dutifully in his sentry box while his wife beds her young lover! (p. 38)), and prostitution is treated as a straightforward scenario of loose women satisfying the natural urges of young men, rather than as a complex sexual economy. Even gang rape is attributed to the idleness of young men (p. 47).

Despite these methodological flaws, *Night in the Middle Ages* contains many valuable and informative moments. It is, first and foremost, a repository of entertaining anecdotes, which are woven together into a coherent and clearly organised narrative. The reader is introduced to some useful concepts such as 'legal night', in which night is defined by curfew and waking bells rather than by the onset or lifting of darkness. The flexibility of medieval notions of time is a recurrent theme in the book, as seen for example in the varying length of an hour in winter and in summer. The Rule of St Benedict emerges as revolutionary in its treatment of night, as in so many other ways: the Rule dictated, for example, that the monks' sleeping quarters should be lit throughout the night, partly as a constraint on vice, partly as a symbolic demonstration of 'living in the light', and partly to enable the monks to maintain silent (i.e. visual rather than verbal) forms of communication. The most valuable section of the book is that detailing the techniques by which man sought to 'tame' night and manage darkness. The brief account in this section of the role played by working hours and curfew times in medieval labour relations is fascinating, as are the insights into the practicalities of night life, such as using cloth rubbed against the nap to get rid of fleas (they land on it and can't get off) or fern leaves to remove flies (they land on the leaves and can

then be thrown out of the window). Verdon has selected many memorable snippets of information, such as the size of the largest recorded blanket (38.79 square metres, belonging to Charles V) and the fact that the ebony was the favoured wood for royal cradles because it supposedly dissipated the child's fear of the dark.

The third section, 'God or Sublime Light', complicates the good-bad dichotomy of day and night by assessing belief in the 'nocturnal presence' of God as manifested in dreams, and describing the night-time prayers and vigils prescribed for, or popular with, the laity. Verdon's closing remarks on the affinity between night and mystical spirituality round off a section that does much to refine and complicate the easy assertion that night in the Middle Ages was both feared and fearsome.

Helen Moore

Tom Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, HarperCollins, 2000, £16.99 (£7.99 pb.)

The publishers have packaged Tom Shippey's *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* as a general book, a 'learned and entertaining introductory companion to some of the finest and most influential works of fantasy fiction ever written'. Hence the book is not end-noted, but does have a bibliography and index. In fact, it engages in a sophisticated literary debate against Tolkien's detractors, presenting a carefully reasoned and measured defence of his literary greatness. As a philologist who was a successor to Tolkien's Chair at Leeds University, Shippey provides a philological analysis of Tolkien's work. He comments, 'In my opinion (it is not one shared, for instance, by the definitions of the *Oxford English Dictionary*), the essence of philology is, first, the study of historical forms of a language or languages, including dialectical or non-standard forms, and also of related languages. ... However, philology is not and should not be confined to language study. The texts in which these old forms of the language survive are often literary works of great power and distinctiveness, and (in the philological view) any literary study which ignores them, which refuses to pay the necessary linguistic toll to be able to read them, is accordingly incomplete and impoverished. Conversely, of course, any study which remains solely linguistic (as was often the case with twentieth century philology) is throwing away its best material and its best argument for existence. In philology, *literary and linguistic study are indissoluble*. They ought to be the same thing.' Tolkien, Shippey points out, believed in this indissolubility.

Though Tolkien's sources are ancient, early English for example, Shippey points out that Tolkien is a writer belonging squarely to our time, concerned with contemporary themes such as the nature of evil (an 'eternal issue' but 'terribly re-focused' in Tolkien's lifetime), cultural relativity, and

the 'corruptions and continuities of language'. Far from being reactionary, Tolkien is at the leading edge in his artistic and intellectual concerns. 'The dominant literary mode of the twentieth century,' argues Shippey, 'has been the fantastic. ... When the time comes to look back at the [twentieth] century, it seems very likely that future literary historians, detached from the squabbles of our present, will see as its most representative and distinctive works books like J R R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and also George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Cat's Cradle*, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot-49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. ... By the end of the century, even writers deeply committed to the realist novel have often found themselves unable to resist the gravitational pull of the fantastic as a literary mode.' Shippey qualifies that this mode, of course, is not the same as fantasy as a literary genre.

For Shippey, therefore, the continuing appeal of Tolkien cannot be ignored as simply a freak of popular consumption, to be ignored by the well-educated. Rather, 'it deserves an explanation and a defence,' which his book 'tries to supply'. The bulk of the book discusses Tolkien's many sources, but also reveals why 'Middle-earth has been a vital contemporary inspiration for so many readers'. Shippey deals in depth with Tolkien's problems in making *The Lord of the Rings*, problems of structure and of invention. Tolkien makes great demands on his readers, presenting with great success a deeply complex pattern of interlacing narrative. This strategy works in Tolkien – as it does in all great fiction – even on those readers unconscious of it. Shippey also sets Tolkien's two major works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, in the context of his other fiction, including *The Silmarillion*, *The History of Middle-earth*, and his short fiction.

Colin Duriez

Nicola Slee, *Faith and Feminism: An Introduction to Christian Feminist Theology*, Darton Longman & Todd, 2003, 160 pp., £8.95 pb.

Nicola Slee's *Faith and Feminism* gives clear and concise outlines of feminist thinking in seminal areas, such as the Bible, religious language, sin, Christology, salvation, pneumatology, ecclesiology and spirituality, and has suggestions for further reading. This introduction to the subject could be used for group study and contains exercises designed to allow people to explore their reactions by considering art, poetry and music. The contributions of Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Phyllis Trible and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza which are beginning to have a 'classical' feel to them are heard alongside the views of Carol Christ, American theologian, and the international perspectives of Chung Hyun Khung and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Korean and Ghanaian theologians respectively. There is also a useful glossary of names and terms, which enables readers to keep track of

any new terms they come across.

Slee notes the grassroots nature of feminist discussion; such open-minded groups also figure in the introduction to Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her*. Although small groups are common in Evangelicalism, I have yet to come across any which studied feminism. If this book were to be used as a basis for such a group of Evangelicals, what reactions might it provoke?

Although the feminist expansion in the eighties did impact Evangelicalism, and many denominations moved to make roles and offices available to women, in Scotland today women are still unable to offer themselves for the Baptist ministry. The Church of Scotland, which began ordaining women as early as 1968, faces extinction in 25 years if it keeps on losing members at its current rate. Callum Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain* (2001) sees the feminization of religion as an ingredient in church decline, and a link between expanded roles for women and institutional failure may reinforce the position of those Evangelical leaders who do not wish to address it. The pragmatic argument does not work – so great is his attraction, that women keep coming to Christ despite ecclesiological androcentricity. Thus small and unimpressive Evangelical churches bump along while even the St Hilda Community is now defunct. Perhaps some women are put off, but not enough within Evangelicalism to cause concern. So while there is some awareness that the more educated women are, the more likely they are to flourish in a church which recognizes them, there is little pressure to change, and a great wariness of broaching again what is usually a very energy-sapping debate. Leaders would not be keen to put this book on a home-group's agenda.

There is also the danger that ordinary women and men in Evangelicalism would not be that keen to read it anyway – some being not so far away from the view of women propounded by American fundamentalists on sites such as www.headcoverings.com. While it is important to recognize the comfort many women feel in Evangelical churches, that is no reason for ignoring the challenges which feminism has set the church – notably, for Evangelical submissives, in the way suggested by V Saiving, and later Judith Plaskow and Susan Nelson Dunfee, that women sin by hiding from their own powers and gifts, giving rise to the non-articulation of the self or the misery of neighbours and family as these considerable strengths are inappropriately displaced into other areas of personal life – Mummy goes nuts if you don't do the dishes because she should actually have been the Archbishop of York. . . .

The chapter on Scripture would, I guess, be the most likely to throw the discussion group into disarray. Slee quotes Daphne Hampson's statement that 'the Biblical [text] is the product of a sexist, indeed, misogynist culture: the presuppositions are written into it. Moreover such texts are more dangerous in that they affect us at a subconscious level' and then asks the reader, 'How would you respond to this challenge?' It does not take much to imagine the assertions about God writing the Bible and the infallibility

of divine inspiration which such a claim would provoke. Issues such as the invisibility or inferiority of women in Scripture would simply be swept aside in a wave of defensiveness and any women who were touched by these sorts of difficulties might find themselves in the awkward position of having some intuition that something was wrong but having insufficient hermeneutical resources to 'read' the text any differently.

Indeed scholarship among Evangelicals has reached high standards, but a great deal of the hermeneutical sophistication which underpins it is often hidden from the laity. Evangelicals are not fundamentalists, and there has always been some fluidity in how Scripture is interpreted. Preachers often bypass this area – why should you lose your audience before you've even started? The problem then is that when ways of moving forward on issues – such as the role of women – which require some visible hermeneutical attention are proposed, they do not easily gain wide acceptance because the process of interpretation which leads to the new conclusion seems like special pleading. I have never heard anyone say that the verses regarding the role of women in the pastoral epistles might be read differently in the light of the fact that these epistles might not have been written by Paul. The implications of this sort of subtlety are rarely made explicit *even in sermons which have been influenced by them*. Refusing to address some of the issues regarding hermeneutics will simply corral us into positions where Scripture becomes an historical blunt instrument rather than a two-edged sword – or the AK47 – it is supposed to be. One of the sad things was that while I reckoned it was unlikely that most ordinary Evangelicals could come up with a way of arguing with Daphne Hampson – perhaps not surprisingly given the gap between the Christian and post-Christian worlds which would have to be bridged – they probably could not have dealt any more easily with Elizabeth Cady Stanton whose arguments are now more than a century old. These are not arguments which disappear. The Bible has to be interpreted. God does not do magic. We have to use our brains and our faith.

I found Nicola Slee's lucid *Faith and Feminism* useful because of the perspective which it allowed me to reflect on current attitudes in that segment of the church with which I am most familiar. A delightful book which provokes much thought.

Beth Dickson

Steve Turner, *Imagine, a Vision for Christians and the Arts*, IVP, 2001, 160 pp., £6.99, pb.

Karen Stone, *Image and Spirit: Finding Meaning in Visual Art*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003, 180pp., 9 colour, 3 b&w plates, £12.95 pb.

Here are two recent books in the succession of works aiming to heal the rift between Christians and art. One of them is excellent.

Imagine is the work of a writer and poet. It is not written at all poetically,

nor does it parade any skills of the writer – yet it is the first Christian book on art I have ever read which I have felt I wanted – rather than felt I ought – to carry on reading. Steve Turner’s style is plain, almost dull, but persistently telling, and I think this is because it conveys the mind of someone who does not have to persuade himself. He has ‘been there’. In fact, ‘Being There’, he tells us, was going to be the title of the book, because, ‘reduced to a single phrase, that was what I felt I was calling Christians to do. I was calling them not to a particular strategy and definitely not to a special subculture, but to simply “be there” where it counts and create something different and challenging by staying faithful and allowing that faith to invade their vision’ (p. 127). He himself has been there to such an extent that, as a rock journalist, he once interviewed John Lennon and shared his faith with him.

Steve Turner learnt of ‘Christ’s lordship over everything’ (everything meaning the world outside the Christian ghetto) from Francis Schaeffer and L’Abri. What makes his book so interesting is that he put into practice what he learnt and has discovered it to be true. This is not lordship expressed as a Christian territorial demand, to capture culture. It is more that culture, as a normal part of being human, is where we should expect to find Christ at work. It is not barred off, it is not a no-go area, and it is a place where Christians, if they do their job well, can achieve respect and a measure of freedom for what they believe. A whole chapter is given to the practicalities of being Christians where any message has to be expressed with authenticity and integrity, and Bono, song writer of U2, is its hero, exemplifying someone whose writing is not trying to score cheap points for the Gospel, but expresses raw issues of faith – with the frankness that the Bible models - but in his own idiom.

Form and expression are not just incidental in Steve Turner’s theology. Many of us have been familiar with a crude ‘translation’ model of expressing Christian faith in culture. We ‘have’ the message in our own language; we learn the ‘foreign’ language of the culture; successfully translate the message, and communication happens. The hidden assumption is that Christ speaks our native language, and culture acts as a screen, by which the pure message is progressively reduced. But on Steve Turner’s understanding, culture is Christ’s language as well. Therefore we learn to speak its forms because it is already an appropriate vehicle for truth. The truth we have already belongs there. But it belongs in a mastery of form, because without a grasp of form, we cannot express the thoughts we have been given in any language (p. 110, quoting Eccles12:10-11). Furthermore it is Christ’s truth, express or implicit, that renews the media.

Steve Turner tackles most of the vexed questions faced by the Christian in the arts, always with the light touch of someone who has first faced them for himself. For example, he admits that church culture can be painful, really painful, for the artist, but urges the necessity nonetheless of

'being there' in the church, not least for our spiritual protection, since we work in such contested territory.

On the question of whether Christian art should be ostensibly Christian, he helpfully suggests a diagram of concentric circles, in which the outer circles represent simply good art, good and enjoyable as a good meal, well within God's purposes but not needing a Christian 'tag'; and towards the centre is art that is more specific, ending at the centre with works expressing the Cross and Gospel. He carefully discusses the artistic challenge of representing the Cross so that it is not diminished by cliché or banality. The strength of his model is that it legitimises the mundane or humorous as well as serious art, by showing that just as the Gospel is at the centre of life and affects all of it, not all of life specifies the Gospel.

Imagine would be valued equally by a young Christian starting out in the arts, or an older Christian who knows the temptation to compromise, either by withdrawing from the art world, or by denying the resources of the Gospel.

Image and Spirit

Christian writing on art seems to fall into two tendencies. One aims to marry artists to Christ. Christ's fullness is the standard, and the boundary. *Imagine* is of this kind. The second aims to marry Christians to art. The problem here is while half of the aim is right – for Christianity without art is incomplete – art as such is so mixed in character, that if we are to marry it we need, like Hosea, to know what sort of wife we are taking on. *Image and Spirit* does not face this issue, and I think that is why this book was, for me rather hard to connect with. Karen Stone wants to link people to art. She has 'a passion to help those who want to be less confused by the art they see, to find meaning in art, and even, through their encounter with art, to discern the Spirit's voice'. To help us overcome our fear and ignorance of art, and view it as a fruitful means of encounter with God's voice, is surely to be applauded. But I found myself wondering whether her beliefs about art were somewhat sentimentalised.

Karen Stone, as well as being a painter, who has studied theology at Westcott, is an experienced art educator. The experience of drawing people into art is the foundation for this book. There are, at any time, many things to see in art: it seems that for her purposes she has deliberately chosen an optimistic view. Perhaps as an afterthought she writes 'I have chosen not to address . . . art's potential as a source for evil . . . a complex, potentially controversial, and enormously fascinating subject that exceeds the scope of the present project' (page xv). However I am not sure that evil is a 'subject' one can choose 'not to address', since it is threaded through every aspect of life. As for finding it 'enormously fascinating', one wonders whether such pseudo-academic detachment really covers up an uncertainty about what evil is.

The consequence for the book of this neutered apprehension of the world is found in both its style and its strategy towards art. The style is

frequently patronising. 'A few prerequisites exist even for the private, personal art critic. First, *become familiar with art*. Go to museums and galleries, read art reviews in the newspaper, look at books on the art that interests you, take in a painting or sculpture class. Second, be as *inclusive* as you can be. This is especially important in our pluralistic age . . .' (p57). Despite all she says, art seems to be reduced to a hobby, a class one 'takes in'. There are pages of advice on how to look at paintings ('Don't be afraid to ask ridiculously obvious questions' p. 104), covering all levels of ignorance. Perhaps I have forgotten what it was like to feel a stranger in front of art, but I cannot imagine a book of this kind, rather than a historical book like *The Story of Art*, making the bridge.

But then, is the intended bridge towards art, or is it to evoking some kind of subjective-spiritual experience? Karen Stone's strategy seems to be to filter the content of art in favour of spiritual uplift. One of the most revealing, and indeed touching parts of the book concerns the story of a man who sat down in front of *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?*, Gauguin's artistic testament before his attempted suicide. The man had suffered two years of stress during the illness of his wife, and Karen Stone relates how the painting brought relief. It helped him stand back from his life as a whole and realise that 'we can't control' what happens to us. Gauguin's profoundly pagan sense of embeddedness in nature helped him to accept that natural processes are real. But what brought peace was something outside the painting, the conviction that he and his wife 'came from God and belong to God, that whatever happens, they will remain in God's loving care. To him, that answered Gauguin's questions' (p. 110). Here, then, the object of viewing art is not so much to be touched by the artist's meaning, as to be touched by God, having been in some way opened to new meanings by the work of art. 'Other interpretations, even the artist's intended meanings, were less important than the work's spiritual meaning to Tom at that particular time and place, in that state of mind (p. 111).

I had hoped that Karen Stone would have some good insights on the relation between word and image, but unfortunately her account seems unable to promote imagery without discounting words. 'Art at its best makes concrete what language and especially religious language cannot: that intangible, private or communal moment when we encounter being' (p10). Yes, there is a place beyond words, but often we need words, even art criticism, to find the way there. Nonetheless, it is good to be reminded not to allow one hemisphere of the brain to censor the activities of the other. This is a well-intentioned book, somewhat fuzzy in theology and not a pleasure to read. Some readers may warm to it, and it does usefully remind us that the body of Christ has a long way to go to recover full use of its senses.

David Thistlethwaite

Paul Crowther, *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, 210pp., £14.99 (pb. 2001)

This is an ambitious and largely successful attempt to articulate an objectively distinct domain for the aesthetic, and the philosophical significance of art. The author argues that we can only know the world through a fully embodied engagement with it. Reflective analysis of an activity automatically renders it qualitatively different, as it is dissected and interpreted according to reductive mental categories. He suggests that this 'abyss' between the abstract and concrete can be bridged through art. Art fuses the two aspects in a symbolic materialism that acts as an analogue for our self-conscious embodiment as human beings within the world. It is valorised as the most useful, comprehensive and instructive exemplar of knowing and being-in-the-world.

Crowther draws on an eclectic and impressive array of philosophers and theorists in order to elaborate and demonstrate his basic thesis. Hegel, Gadamer, Kant, Heidegger, Schiller, Merleau-Ponty and Clive Bell, among others, act as partners in an esoteric and wide-ranging dialogue. Through a process of general analysis, acknowledged indebtedness, and trenchant critique, Crowther carves out and elaborates his own definition of the aesthetic domain. It is characterised by a logical disinterestedness. Art objects are necessarily apprehended as being 'between immediate sensuousness and ideal thought' (p. 40). Importantly, the work bears traces of the artist's personal history and way of seeing the world, but because it is distanced and objectified in a product of human artifice, this enables the audience to engage in a free imaginative identity with the artist. Common human problems or emotions, their solution and recognition are shared, in a 'disalienating reciprocity'. The link between artist, work and person is persuasive. Crowther helps to free abstract art from a constrictive and alienating armour of theorisation. By rendering the aesthetic an essential aspect of human embodiment (a universal which can scarcely be transcended in the temporal world) he disarms the objection that it is historically contingent, materially dependent, and thus politically alienating. The consequent postulates that artist and audience, in so far as they achieve self-recognition, are to be regarded as a paradigm of unalienated labour and culture that may act as an effective agent of political change seems far more problematic.

The second section of the book examines the philosophical importance of art. The essential thrust of this is implicit in Crowther's exploration of the aesthetic. In the process, he makes some pertinent comments on current trends in academic discourse. Thus, in Chapter Four, a heady mix of Kant and Heidegger provides the observation that subject matter in art plays an important conceptual role. It is the 'intentional core around which limitless possibilities of experience are able to cluster in harmonious self-disclosure' (p. 82). However, this is not the extreme relativity of interpretation that so often appears to rob artworks of their own integrity. The relationship is reciprocal and the multiplicity of interpretations is

governed by a rational element that limits the field: the 'intentional core' behind or underneath the natural phenomena that guides the imagination of the audience in its reading. Chapter Six tightens Merleau-Ponty's use of art as an exemplification of philosophy, in order to suggest that successful painting (i.e. that which both creatively uses tradition and offers a new understanding of perception and the world) through the aesthetic consideration of its formal features, leads to a philosophical understanding of the nature of seeing in a primary sense. This is important, because it frees art from an obsession with process, whilst allowing it true philosophical significance. But the most delightful gem is found in Chapter Seven. In the midst of his discussion of Hegel's philosophical analysis of architecture, Crowther indulges in a brief excursus on deconstructionist theory. The logic of deconstruction applied to a fine art that depends upon construction more than any other provides a rare moment of humour in an otherwise dense and tightly argued book.

The final section, devoted to a terse outline of the 'ecological significance of art', draws together these aesthetic and philosophical threads in a beautifully systematic manner. The possibilities of human consciousness (attention, comprehension and projection), which develop in a general way through social interaction, are shown to achieve self-awareness in a uniquely paradigmatic manner, by enhancement and reflection, when engaging with works of art. Or in different terms, art exemplifies the process of human being-in-the-world as it is experienced, and makes this rationally available to different audiences, through its ability to last beyond the finite contingency of individual human existence.

As is only to be expected, it is here also that Crowther reveals the fundamental presuppositions underlying his argument, and directing his understanding of the use and purpose of art. His link between art and self-consciousness, shaped by an evolutionary paradigm, leads him to question its ultimate goal. He is deliberately secular, rejecting 'myths of religion' (p. 175) and re-defining redemption in temporal, human terms. Art becomes religiously inflected, despite his disavowal of the 'pseudo-mystical sense' (p. 179), as simultaneously finite and trans-finite. Works of art are unique objects, a publicly accessible medium which can be shared by others across space and time, providing a model and facilitating an experience of free intercourse that lifts the individual to what Crowther defines as the higher level of becoming: species consciousness. It is at this point that I must part company. Despite his earlier recognition of the distinction between embodied consciousness and 'communion with a transcendental reality' (p. 47), philosophy and art are here posited as offering the highest possibility of human existence in their combination of the finite and trans-finite. Anything beyond has already been pejoratively bracketed and implicitly dismissed as irrelevant under pseudo-mysticism and religious myth.

However, if one lays this dimension aside, Crowther's book provides a coherent and persuasively argued definition of art, the aesthetic and its significance. He finishes with a cogent analysis of excesses in contemporary

criticism: indicating that inter-textuality is essential to the achievement of originality truly defined. Barthes' influential thesis on the 'death of the author' is characterised as an exaggerated reaction to high Romanticism, while the historical relativism and determined subjectivity of Marxist, feminist and poststructuralist criticism is faulted for its reductiveness. Power and ideology are real social issues, but this does not negate the fact that there is 'a rational and objective continuity to cultural production and exchange that ranges far beyond the hegemony of dominant power-groups' (pp. 199-200). It is the logical, comprehensive and sane articulation of this objective dimension to art and criticism that renders his book so salutary and intriguing.

Alison O'Harae

Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period*, Oxford University Press, 2003, x+320pp., £50

The order of precedence of 'Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation' in the title of Jon Mee's new book somewhat belies the work's objective. For at its conclusion, when Mee comes to ask the question 'Where does this account of the poetics of enthusiasm leave our understanding of romanticism?' he feels able to answer 'My inclination is to regard enthusiasm as the larger and more capacious term' (p. 294). This book, then, is one that tries to redefine our notion of what Romanticism is all about. Enthusiasm, Mee argues, provides the context for understanding Romanticism, rather than vice versa.

The interplay of Romanticism and enthusiasm is mediated by the third term in the title, 'regulation', whose intermediary role is explained in part by the subtitle, 'Poetics and the Policing of Culture'. Mee will develop the argument that in the work of certain poets – Coleridge and Wordsworth particularly – poetics is the policing of culture, particularly when 'culture' means the radical forms of religious and political feeling that Mee defines as enthusiasm. Here the book enters an important discussion with those New Historicist critics who, over the last twenty years, have done so much to problematize Romanticism. Writers such as Alan Liu and Marjorie Levinson have argued that Romantic poetry (particularly that of Wordsworth) represents a denial of history because it deforms, obscures, and mystifies historical actualities for the purpose of constructing a stable sovereign self. Like other critics, Mee wants to get some distance from such readings, and does so in an original way. He argues that New Historicists have got it right with regard to the issue of denial, but wrong with the issue of what is being denied. The New Historicist appeal to 'history' is itself abstract, and Mee works towards specifying the 'history' that has been denied: 'the Romantic Apocalypse of the Imagination represents not so much a displacement of History as the rewriting of prophecy', a rewriting he describes as the

‘rehabilitation of enthusiasm’ (pp. 238-9).

The book, then, has two goals. Firstly, to convince its audience of the importance and omnipresence of enthusiasm in the period; secondly to deploy New Historical critical strategies to show that key poems of the period betray an attempt to regulate enthusiasm itself. The book is, accordingly, divided into two parts. Part One is a carefully-researched exploration of the meanings and polemical usages of ‘enthusiasm’ during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, focussing particularly on the 1790s (the decade familiar from Mee’s previous monograph, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s*). This detailed historical research deals with the question of what ‘enthusiasm’ was. Part Two brings this history into discussion with poetry by reading, in separate chapters, the work of four pre-eminent poets of the 1790s: Coleridge, Wordsworth, Barbauld, and Blake. It is this discussion that makes the case for placing Romanticism inside enthusiasm.

The discussion of Part One winds through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, meticulously untwining and interrelating the secular and religious uses of the term ‘enthusiasm’. But this is much more than an exercise in etymology. Mee challenges oversimplified retrospective notions of enthusiasm which present it as a straightforward effusiveness that provided the emotional impetus to the development of lyric poetry. He begins by pointing out, for example, that ‘The primary meaning of the word enthusiasm for about two centuries or more in English defined a specifically religious error’ (p. 2). Mee creates a convincing and carefully-articulated discussion between the central political, religious, and philosophical thinkers of the period, particularly Shaftesbury, Burke, Paine, Thelwall, Priestley, Godwin, Hume, Rousseau, and John Wesley. He illuminates the complex investment made in the term by these different writers in a detailed, wide-ranging, and often surprising discussion.

Part Two makes the difficult move of attempting to bind historical and cultural particularities to evasive poetic texts. These texts become a space where the anxieties (or in Blake’s case, delights) of enthusiasm are played out. Coleridge’s conversation poems provide a famous example: ‘Coleridge uses the domestic space to negotiate a route between the twin poles of enthusiasm, that is, the implosion of the unsociable self and its infectious dissemination into the crowd’ (p. 158). According to Mee, Coleridge’s burgeoning conservatism succeeds in regulating his early political and religious enthusiasm by retracting into the domestic. Wordsworth is shown to have achieved a similar policing of enthusiasm through poetry itself. His disciplined ‘recollection in tranquillity’ is both a means to disengage himself from the volatile immediacy of enthusiasm, and a way to separate his own poetic sensibility from the crude enthusiasm of the masses. Hence Mee argues:

The poems that were gathered together in *Lyrical Ballads* are to some extent a collection of case studies of characters unable to regulate their enthusiasm fully for themselves. Although their passions allow them to animate the

universe with what Barbauld called 'factitious life' and experience the dim awakenings of the genuine moral sense, they cannot bring off the meditative discipline that Wordsworth himself lays full claim to in poems such as 'Tintern Abbey' and later *The Prelude* (p. 222).

This argument, while full of interest in itself, often fails to convince for lack of evidence. In this instance, the broad claim made about this central romantic text is not adequately backed up. The discussion of the 'case studies of characters' does not, for example, include any of the obvious candidates: no Simon Lee, no Michael, no Goody Blake, no Harry Gill. In fact the only poem from *Lyrical Ballads* that is discussed is *Peter Bell*, which, as Mee notes, was 'not actually included in the collection, and not published finally until 1819' (p. 222).

Much of what is best in Part Two seems almost incidental to its main theme – the discussion, for example, of the Hunt brothers' criticism of Blake, or the poetry of Robert 'Della Crusca' Merry (p. 227) that comes amid the analysis of Wordsworthian regulation. The arguments may not always convince here, but the focus and research remains unexpected and engaging, and the successes of the two parts of this book, while interconnected, are not, at root, interdependent. The first line of the introduction reads: 'The purpose of this book is simple. It aims to renew our sense of the cultural importance of "enthusiasm" in the Romantic period' (p. 1). In these terms the book knows its scope and strengths, and achieves the goal it has set itself. The occasionally unpersuasive readings of the poetry do not diminish the importance of the complex cultural discourse that Mee has brought to light.

Jonathan Roberts

Mark Pryce, *Literary Companion for Festivals: Readings for Commemorations Throughout the Year*, SPCK, 2003, 189pp., £14.99 pb.

This volume, a follow-up to Mark Pryce's *Literary Companion to the Lectionary* (2001), offers poems and readings to accompany the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and the *Anglican Common Worship*. Though entitled *Literary Companion to Festivals*, its contents actually link less to Festivals than to ordinary commemorations of saints and 'holy men and women'. There are one hundred and twelve entries: twenty-eight of them are official Festivals. The selection is made largely on the basis of commemorations which are common to both Anglican and Lutheran traditions.

The literary companion-pieces are selected according to a variety of criteria. Sometimes the figure being commemorated supplies the piece (for example, Christina Rossetti's poem 'Darkness and light' is chosen for her day, 27th April; a translation of a poem by Alcuin for his, 20th May). Sometimes the figure is the subject of the reading (for example St Martin as treated by Thom Gunn). Sometimes the figure just happens to be mentioned

in the piece selected (for example, Aquinas and Mary Magdalene are not really Edith Sitwell's subject matter; their names appear almost accidentally in the passages chosen from her pen). And sometimes the figure has an even more tenuous connection with the piece presented (for example, St Barnabas, son of consolation, is linked to 'these words of consolation' by Derek Walcott; St Benedict, who had an interest in religious community, is tied to D.H. Lawrence's 'similar vision of domestic harmony' in his poem 'Pax'). Of these four criteria, the first two are obvious and natural; the third can be indulged; but the fourth is too much. The readings selected in this way are not companion-pieces but mere fellow-travellers, and this objection is real even when the fellow-traveller is congenial and comely. For instance, Yeats's 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven' is a lovely poem and attaches nicely to those cloth-spinners, Lydia, Dorcas and Phoebe (January 27th) of Romans and Acts. But there was never any thought in Yeats's mind to connect it in this way, and it is only Mark Pryce's word-association, acting as editorial Pandar, that brings them together. However fun and even fruitful they may be, such couplings are illicit textual bed-hoppings. They are like 'kangaroo exegesis' of the Bible, easy, beguiling, but in the last resort banal. Fortunately, such choices account for a small proportion of the whole.

Once criteria have been discussed, there is not much more for a reviewer to say about a book of this kind: it largely comes down to personal preference. I love Herbert's 'Prayer' (chosen for 27th February), but like 'The Flower' even more and would have been glad to see it here. (Also, does 'The Flower' not tell us a little bit more about Herbert the man than 'Prayer' does – one of the purposes, presumably, of such commemorations?) Henry Martyn's memory, I feel, is ill-served by a rhythmically abominable translation of a Persian hymn, which has nothing to do with Martyn at all, save that he once worked in Persia. And I feel that Isaac Watts would have been better represented by 'When I survey' or 'Jesus shall reign' – or indeed, almost anything – than by the excerpt from 'True Riches' with its jaunty couplet about beauties 'More remote from public View / Than the bowels of Peru'. Other hymn-writers such as Baxter, Winkworth, Charles Wesley and Luther are memorialized much more handsomely by the selections from their work, where Pryce sticks to what is well-known and often anthologized (for which there is a reason).

Still, one goes to a book of this kind not just to meet old favourites but to find new treasures. I particularly valued Judith Wright's 'Grace', Rossetti's 'Peter', Stevie Smith's 'The Airy Christ' and the prose passages from Kathleen Raine and Vaclav Havel. There is much in this volume both to satisfy the literary appetite and to whet the theological imagination, and it will doubtless be of use not only to private devotions, but also (carefully handled) in public worship. As Walter Brueggemann writes in his Foreword, this collection serves to counter our individualism, our amnesia and our profanation. A book worth having.

Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England*, CUP, 2003, 314pp., £45

In 1671 John Milton published *Paradise Regain'd. A Poem. In IV Books. To which is added Samson Agonistes*. It was a volume that brought together two quite different works. The first, Milton's brief epic, retells Jesus' resistance to the temptations of Satan. The second, a verse drama, is his reworking of the explosive story of Samson that culminates in Samson's violent destruction of the Philistine theatre. In the context of Restoration England, this volume spoke directly to the needs of religious dissenters who struggled with feelings of loss ever since the return of the monarchy. They had faced, through the 1660s, a series of government measures aimed at cracking down on nonconformity. The first question to be addressed was how could they go on, living under such pressure? *Paradise Regain'd* responded with the themes of patience and steadfast resolve. Jesus' reasoned rebuttal of Satan was a model for all who felt doubts and temptations. But such doubts arose because of a second question: how did they know God had not abandoned them? Here the Samson story was a dramatic reminder of God's powerful reappearance in the hour of need of one of the saints. But the latter is also a story of God's judgement brought forward, a narrative of the immediate punishment of the ungodly. Suffering patiently and yet longing for divine vindication were thus interwoven strands within the tradition of seventeenth-century dissenting literature.

Sharon Achinstein's fine book, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England*, traces these competing impulses within the literature of nonconformity in Restoration England. It examines the variety of media through which dissenters engaged in acts of remembrance and mutually encouraged one another to persevere: funerals that challenged state-imposed ceremony and liturgy, and funeral sermons that reinforced a collective identity among the suffering faithful. Prison writings underlined that persecution was the mark of the saint. In particular, the book of Lamentations and the fall of Jerusalem were used as a framework for understanding dissenters' own sense of exclusion. Achinstein covers much ground in her study, exploring not only the themes within dissenting literature, but also the poetics of dissent that underlies it. Dissenters longed for divine inspiration and a sincere connection between themselves and God. Rejecting many contemporary styles and fashions they found expression in spontaneous, even rapturous, poetry. Thus the Song of Songs was a much dwelt upon text (Achinstein identifies thirty-two commentaries or works of poetry based upon it between 1640 and 1700). Sensuousness in poetry that stimulated spiritual desire for the Lord was used in the fight against the hedonism of the age.

What is particularly interesting is her discussion of the violence manifest in dissenting literature. For them, violence was 'the sign of God's involvement in earthly affairs' (p. 90). She explores the way in which the traditional deferral of the eschaton was frequently pressed hard, and often

overcome, by the desire for judgement to be brought here and now.

An illuminating discussion of Milton's 1671 volume ends by exploring the arrangement of the two works. Ending with the violent Samson story enacts a call to God that his wrath might answer the dissenters' plight. Here the book is not without anxiety over its subject. Of Bunyan's representations of judgement she asks: 'Is that imagined violence a safety valve through which can be expressed the abundant rage at injustice in the present? Or is the violence itself a real threat?' (p. 106). It seems a pointedly modern question. Put in its Restoration context, dissenting literature is shown to be an important stage along the road to the enlightenment and the 'disentanglement of saving souls from the business of politics' (p. 4) – faith located in its more recognisably private domain. Persecuted, excluded and eager to see justice done, Achinstein shows the dissenters to be an extremely illuminating case. But it is perhaps worth saying that if the notion of God's justice and wrath (certainly over-emphasised within dissenting literature) should seem so altogether unfamiliar, it may say more about our secular age in which God's judgement holds no terror at all.

Paul Matholé

Ian Bradley, *The Celtic Way*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2nd edition 2003, first published 1993, 152pp., £8.95 pb.

In his preface to the new edition of *The Celtic Way*, Ian Bradley acknowledges that he has, since writing the first, been challenged on a number of views relating to his understanding and interpretation of Celtic Christianity. However, he leaves his text unaltered, remaining faithful to what he regards as the 'integrity' of the original. His authorial loyalty provides us with a literary document which is aware and unashamed of its own historicity, and is itself a touchstone and a tribute to the ever-changing Celtic tradition.

The Celtic Way should have a wide appeal as an accessible introduction to Celtic spirituality past and present. Bradley takes us on a journey of exploration through a rich and diverse heritage, as he traces themes and traditions which have shaped and influenced Celtic culture. There is a compelling sense of continuity which characterises the Celtic spirit, as it embraces the mysticism and otherworldliness of a pagan past, while proving to be culturally relevant within the contemporary context.

Bradley reveals that the cultural universality which characterises Celtic spirituality derives from acceptance of other modes of worship which preceded the birth of Celtic Christianity within Britain.

A prominent theme of Bradley's text is the way in which Celtic spirituality incorporated the pagan legacy into its worship of a Divine Being, its celebration of nature and the environment, and its emphasis on community. Bradley shows us that the Celts sought to enrich their own culture with elements of the pagan in a way which did not compromise

or over-liberalise their own beliefs. His repeated use of the term 'baptize' is useful, as it demonstrates the process of renewal and reappropriation, which sought to Christianise pagan traditions without loss or erasure. Bradley asserts that 'with imagination and with faith many of [paganism's] central features and symbols – the standing stones, the sacred groves and springs, the power of circles, the poems, runes and chants – could be baptized and incorporated into Christian worship and witness.' There is a sense of a textual, symbolic and spiritual palimpsest that enriches and energises Celtic Christianity, imparting an organic quality to a tradition which resists stasis and closure.

A key theme in Celtic Christianity is the belief in the beneficence of nature, and Bradley devotes a chapter of his book to the discussion of nature's pervasive presence in the Celtic tradition. The natural world was sacred to the pagans, as they 'worshipped rivers, forests and hills as the dwelling places of divinities and sacred spirits'. Their reverence for the natural world could be incorporated within a Christian context, as the Celts recognised and worshipped the creative power and majesty of the Creator God, reflected in the wonder of nature. The Celts believed that God's presence permeated the natural world, and Creator and created were inextricably linked in a mysterious and mystic union, which rendered God's omnipresence as a tangible reality in everyday life. Indeed, this belief extended to the sense of interconnectedness between the material world and the spiritual world, which were seen not as separate entities, but as interdependent realms.

In relation to ecological matters, Bradley sees that the Celts' reverence for the natural world can be aligned with contemporary concerns over environmental issues, as increased awareness of global warming and de-forestation emphasise a widespread disregard for the welfare of the planet. There is a timelessness about the Celtic tradition, as concerns relating to fundamental questions of civilization resonate with enduring relevance within our contemporary society. The importance of the natural world is also apparent in examples of Celtic art and iconography. Once again, Bradley testifies to the rich inheritance of the pagan tradition, which influenced Celtic art, as Biblical imagery and pagan imagery were combined in a visual, symbolic and spiritual fusion.

For Bradley, the Celtic knot is a perennial symbol of the Celtic culture as a whole, as it exemplifies the sense of tension that reconciles diverse elements within a unifying and cohesive tradition. It represents the sense of continuity that makes the Celtic faith universally relevant to generations past and present, as its intertwining pattern seems without beginning or end. If Bradley is in danger of overusing this symbol, it is because it translates rather neatly into all areas of his discussion. It simultaneously displays the relationship between the Trinity, the encircling presence of a protective God, the interdependence of the supernatural and natural with the sense of renewal, which returns to the encompassing theme of nature.

Bradley calls his last chapter 'The Way Goes On', which suggests that

his conclusion is more a frontier than a resting place, as it evokes the sense of progress and pilgrimage which characterises the Celtic tradition. It is a fitting note on which to continue the Celtic journey.

Jane Barrett

Debbie Pinfold, *The Child's View of the Third Reich in German Literature. The Eye Among the Blind*, Oxford: OUP, 2001, 279 pp., bibliog., footnotes, index, £45.

German society has understandably suffered a number of conspiracies of silence in the years following the Second World War. For many years German schools taught sketchily about the German experience under the Third Reich. The publication in English this year of W G Sebald's sadly posthumous account of German suffering of saturation bombing at the end of the War (*On the Natural History of Destruction*, Hamish Hamilton) has awakened English-speaking people to the fact there is a unique slice of human experience waiting to be uncovered in years to come. Anthony Beevor's magisterial account of the fall of Berlin to the Soviets continues this trend.

Pinfold's excellent survey of the use of a child's perspective in postwar German literature begins with a brief exposition of the technique of defamiliarization as first described by the Russian formalists, specifically Viktor Shklovsky. How to describe and relate to the uniquely German experience of the Third Reich? In postwar German literature, beside children there are con-men, clowns and others. However, for German writers eager to rebuild their culture following the disasters of the Third Reich, such a thing is by no means straightforward. That original culture had failed to protect against the manifold perversions and idiocies of Nazism. And that very culture and language had itself been serially polluted and perverted. Gruppe 47, a group of artists formed after the War, and including such luminaries as Grass and Böll, sought to rescue something from the devastations of Nazi propaganda. Postwar German culture has been full of doubt and the need to re-evaluate.

How to gain the astringent defamiliarizing perspective of the outsider? Nowadays in the UK writers such as Monika Ali and Zadie Smith offer a perspective not only upon the experience of post-war immigrant communities but a thought-provoking perception of what Britain is now like. But it is difficult to create plausible outsiders. English literature is also familiar with aspects of children and children's literature handling profound, embarrassing and difficult topics. One wonders where we would be in Christian literature were it not for the contribution of those writing allegedly for and about children! Debbie Pinfold, a lecturer in German at Oxford University, presents the fruits of her 1996 DPhil thesis to a wider audience.

Following upon Rousseau's *Emile* – original innocence personified

– the post-romantic European literary tradition tends to view children as innocents. German literature preserves a strong outsider tradition and children feature from the dawn of that literature. But making use of childlike innocence was by no means straightforward,

The childlike element in modern German literature is important in a very broad sense for, if the reassertion of the positive myth of childhood reaffirms the German belief in the artist, then the dominance of the childlike in literature reaffirms the German belief in culture as a means of preserving human values. All art may be childlike in a purely aesthetic sense, but the post-war preoccupation with the child and the childlike carries ethical implications. . . . (p. 244).

As Pinfold points out, the child embodies those uncertainties and offers the possibility of transcendence. This first class study demonstrates exactly how, in the work of Günter Grass, Siegfried Lenz and Christa Wolf, German writers have sought to rebuild their culture and reflect upon the dreadful experience inflicted upon Europe by the Nazis, most especially upon Germany itself. It is a study well worth undertaking, with important lessons not just for Germany but for other cultures as they seek to re-shape their narrative tradition albeit with a less traumatising past.

Robert Willoughby

Laurent Tirard, *Moviemakers' Master Class*, Faber & Faber, 2002, 215 pp., £12.99

The Moviemakers' Master Class is a collection of 20 interviews with some of the most innovative and influential film directors of the last 40 years. Along the way we meet John Boorman, Sydney Pollack, Claude Sautet, Woody Allen, Bernardo Bertolucci, Martin Scorsese, Wim Wenders, Pedro Almodóvar, Tim Burton, David Cronenberg, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, David Lynch, Oliver Stone, John Woo, the Coen brothers, Takeshi Kitano, Emir Kusturica, Lars von Trier, Wong Kaw-wai, Jean-Luc Godard. Each interview is based on the same set of questions about the process of film-making, from how a director decides on what lens to use, to where he (they are all male) places the camera, to how he directs the actors. These are interviews which are intended to display the artisanship as well as the art of film making (and happily, this is a volume which shows the limits of this distinction), and as a result Tirard has produced a fine volume which shows the extreme diversity among the directors, as well as the technical and intellectual complexity of film making. We are also (mostly) allowed to see the thinking which fills the screen, and occasionally we hear comments which illuminate the power and attraction of the cinematic experience which, arguably, became the dominating art form of the last century (it is of interest to note that Zadie Smith recently commented that she writes with movies in mind – even the modern novel is impacted by the screen).

We will pick out some details from the interviews of particular note,

although they are all of interest (with the exception, perhaps, of the Coen brothers' interview which, this reader felt, failed to elicit any particular insight into the origins of their films' dark playfulness). Tirard helpfully divides the directors up into six categories (with Jean-Luc Godard given the honour of his very own category!). Opening with what he calls the 'Groundbreakers', a group who began to explore the possibilities of film making 'before the cultural upheavals of the late sixties' (p. 1), and in the first, with John Boorman (the only British director), we hear of the seismic shift which occurred in the history of cinema when D W Griffith 'started moving the camera and the camera became a sort of God's-eye view, an omniscient view that could move anywhere' (p. 8). With this, Boorman suggests, cinema came close to the condition of dreaming. This condition speaks both of the possibility of creating strange, new worlds in film (we see this most obviously in Tim Burton's interview), but also of not being sure where or what the world is about. Sydney Pollack picks up on this theme when he suggests that there are only two types of film makers: 'those who know and understand a truth which they want to communicate to the world, and those who are not quite sure what the answer is' (p. 15). Pollack places himself in the latter category. Oliver Stone, for example, seems to place himself in the former (p. 137). Tirard's volume illuminates very well (perhaps because he retains the same set of questions for each interviewee) such differences between directors.

The notion of having something to say is picked up by Martin Scorsese, whom Tirard identifies as 'the most impressive filmmaker of the past twenty years' (p. 57). Scorsese suggests that the key for film is whether it is 'personal', whether it is 'about yourself, about the world you came from' (p. 59). This sense of film being the product of inside knowledge emerges in one of the most illuminating comments of the book, when he speaks of his use of medium shots (and the absence of close shots) in *Goodfellas*, as a means of showing that the world depicted on screen is a world in which the characters 'have people around them all the time, and what they do always affects the world around them' (p. 67). This is an insight born of knowledge, and one which contributes to the sense in *Goodfellas* of the individual being morally compromised in the complex of human relations.

Interestingly, the two directors in the volume who perhaps explore the dreamlike quality of film most obviously, although in very different ways, are Tim Burton and David Lynch, and their two interviews are among the most entertaining in the volume, in Burton's case mainly for the story of a creatively constipated Jack Palance on the set of *Batman* (p. 99)! Perhaps unsurprisingly, Burton's background was in animation, while Lynch originally wanted to be a painter (p. 125), and speaks of his fascination with 'texture' (p. 130). What is clear from this is the extent to which there are directors who seem much more driven by the visual possibilities of cinema than by the conventions of storytelling (this seems to reach its most extreme case in Lynch's bizarre *Lost Highway*). Yet this does not mean that such agendas are lacking in moral content, and interestingly both Burton and

Lynch confess that unconsciously they return again and again to the same themes or obsessions (pp. 110 & 130).

The volume closes with an interview of Jean-Luc Godard, a key player in the New Wave movement of the 1960s. In a rather sombre assessment of the state of contemporary cinema (in which he says he finds it increasingly difficult to find people interested in making films), Godard speaks of the positive potential of cinema to deal with two types of content: 'the visible and the invisible' (p. 209). What he seems to mean is that cinema is not merely an ocular art form, even if most cinema is intended only as a feast for the eyes. Rather, for him 'real films . . . are those where there is something invisible, which can be seen – or discerned – through the visible part' (p. 209). Whatever Godard means by this, it would appear that his vision (*sic*) for cinema is as something which may open up minds rather than close them. Tirard's volume is a fascinating insight into the working minds and practices of 20 very influential individuals, and in the process of gathering and publishing he has certainly opened up the mind of this reader to the further possibilities of cinema. A book well worth reading for all interested in the power and potential of film.

Jonathan Norgate

Latter Days

The evening's quiet now the gale has gone,
like life when wildness is no more;
for now I see how fondly once I reached
for vanity in youth, those empty quests
that blinded me to Christ.

My soul now housed in body growing old,
ragged by suffering time has wrought,
peeps through its shattered walls;
my strength in weakness grows
the nearer I draw home.

Leaving the past behind I glimpse the new,
standing on the threshold of my room with God.

John Waddington-Feather

Notes on Contributors

Jane Barrett is a postgraduate student at the University of Dundee, where she is currently completing a doctoral thesis on Contemporary Scottish Poetry.

Jo Carruthers wrote her PhD at Manchester on literary appropriations of the Book of Esther. She is currently a Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow in English at Lancaster University, and is working on a cultural history of the Jewish festival Purim. Her wider research interests include the interplay between narrative, religious identity and national identity.

Beth Dickson teaches English at St Aloysius' College, Glasgow.

Colin Duriez is author of *The C.S. Lewis Encyclopedia*, *The Inklings Handbook* (with David Porter), *Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings*, and *J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: The Story of Their Friendship*.

Margaret Helps was Head of the English Department at Hereford Sixth Form College before her retirement.

American poet **Mary Kennan Herbert**, originally from St. Louis, Missouri, now lives in Brooklyn, NY, where she teaches literature and writing courses at Long Island University. Six collections of her poems have been published; her poetry has appeared in 15 different countries, in numerous literary and theological journals including *Theology Today*, *Ecotheology*, *Review for Religious Cross Currents*, *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, and *Windhover*, among others.

Paul Matholé is a doctoral student at Royal Holloway, University of London and a member of St. Andrew the Great in Cambridge.

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Jonathan Norgate studied English & Theology at King's College, Cambridge, Systematic Theology at King's College, London and is currently doing doctoral research in 19th century German theology at King's College, Aberdeen.

A D Nuttall is the author of *A New Mimesis, Why does Tragedy give Pleasure?* and many other books. His most recent book, *Dead from the Waist Down: Scholars and Scholarship in Literature and the Popular Imagination* (Yale University Press, 2003), is a study of the idea of the scholar in the Renaissance and in the nineteenth century.

Alison O’Harae, working for a PhD at the University of Sydney, Australia, is seeking to develop a Biblical view of the imagination. She is currently focusing on aspects of the work of John Bunyan and Samuel Rutherford.

Jonathan Roberts is a lecturer in English at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He has research interests in Blake and Wordsworth, and in the Bible and literature. He is currently working on a reappraisal of Wordsworth’s poetry 1807-14.

Dr Andrew Tate is lecturer in English and Deputy Director of the Ruskin Programme at Lancaster University. He is the author of essays on, amongst others, John Ruskin, Robert Browning, Charles Spurgeon and Douglas Coupland. His most recent work has been published in *Literature and Theology* and *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*. He is currently completing a study of the miraculous in contemporary American and British fiction.

Until he left the staff of UCCF in 1996, **David Thistlethwaite** was associated with the CLSG as Professional Groups Secretary. David has published *The art of God and the religions of Art* for Solway/Paternoster (1998), has taught art history in Cheltenham, and now paints landscapes and works for a Christian environmental charity.

Michael Ward read English at Oxford and Theology at Cambridge. He is currently training for the Anglican priesthood at Ridley Hall in Cambridge and studying for a PhD through the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts at St Andrews University.

An Anglican NSM priest, **John Waddington-Feather** is a retired schoolmaster and author. He is the author of several children’s novels, and his verse play *Garlic Lane* won the Burton Award in 1999. In 2002 he was awarded the American DeWitt prize for his poetry. He directs the Feather Books imprint and edits *The Poetry Church* quarterly.

A former President of UCCF, and Chairman of the Keswick Convention Council, **Keith Weston** was Rector of St Ebbe’s, Oxford, from 1964 to 1985.

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

News & Notes

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Autum conference

Attend, or offer to read a paper at the autumn conference. As we go to press the 2004 conference is being planned, but papers may be forthcoming on allegory, Bunyan and Conrad, plus an item or two by exponents of Christian theory. The deadline for contributors' offers is 17 April. Information will be updated on the CLSG website www.cls.org